

ON THE LAST TRIP WITH OUR LORD—Luke 13

Onwards to His cross

As early in Luke's record as 9:51, after the Transfiguration and healing of the demon-tormented boy, the Lord 'set his face to go to Jerusalem, (ESV)' for the last time (matching the order in Matthew 17 and Mark 9). Here in Luke 13:22, the point is made again. It would add to the tension for the disciples, though hardly for their Master, that later some Pharisees said to Him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.' With the increasing hostility of the sect in the closing months of Jesus' ministry, it seems most probable that this was aimed at dissuading Him from further threats to their own prestige, rather than genuine care for His safety. It's clear, however, that the Lord was preparing His own for the suffering that would come with open persecution, as the four mentions of His own destiny in Matthew's record show (16:21; 17:9,22; 20:17-19); and Luke is surely using the news of Pilate's callous treatment of the Galileans, and the disaster in Siloam, to add to this theme. It was the Good Shepherd strengthening His flock (including those not of the Twelve). He takes opportunity to send a message of unsparing truth to Herod about his

own character, and the certainty that his actions would never hinder the divine plan that sacrifice would be made at the Passover hour, in the place of the Father's choice. Listen, however, to the chapter closing with the outpouring of Jesus' heart of love for His people—and even for those hardened against Him.

Luke's respect for one woman

It is then most fitting that Doctor Luke records here the care of the Saviour for the woman bowed down by spirit power, described with medical precision, recognising the condition and its source: 'who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.' That day she was rewarded for her (doubtless regular) visits to the synagogue by the Creator who could rebuild her spine, and could also deal with the evil that caused her affliction. How she would love the Man whose face she looked on as she raised up her own in amazed release; and heard Him speak of her dignity as 'a daughter of Abraham'! There were faces red with shame; while the people were delighted at this Man who could answer the authorities

with authority and act with power from above.

The author's skill

Luke distinguishes this account with fine points worthy of the Creator's hand at work: 'And he was teaching' is unusual wording—not the past tense of *didaskō* = 'teach', but the verb to be, with a participle, *didaskon*, meaning 'was teaching as his custom was'. 'On the Sabbath' also stands out, being plural in the Greek—those Sabbaths, one after another, were greatly

enriched by the devoted service of the Lord of the Sabbath: for the people of Galilee were at last seeing the great light Isaiah had foretold.

'O Saviour Christ, our woes dispel ...
For some have lost the love they had ...
Thy touch has still its ancient power;
No word from Thee can fruitless fall ...
And in Thy mercy heal us all.'

H. Twells
M.A.

From Study Groups

'WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE?' (Luke 13)

From Aberdeen: Sidlow Baxter views the parables of the 'mustard seed' and the 'leaven' as simply an indication of the growth of the kingdom of God (*Explore The Book*, J. S. Baxter p.168). Nevertheless, a case can be made for the view that the 'birds' and the 'leaven' represent evil which spreads throughout the kingdom [Comment 1].

Perhaps there is significance in the fact that those two parables are preceded by the earlier parable of 'wheat' and 'tares' growing together (Mat. 13:30). Leaven is generally set forth in Scripture as symbolising evil or corruption. How might evil be at work in the present age? The leaven certainly may have begun its work among the early flock. Paul warned the disciples that 'from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them' (Acts 20:30 NASB). Evil doctrines and practices progressed further when church and state became intertwined. In more recent times the introduction of evolution to replace creation is apparently gathering pace throughout Christian circles. Some years ago, brainwashing was associated with communist regimes, but now we have a more subtle form of brainwashing to contend with. We have the daily doctrine of evolution being

constantly presented, and assumed to be correct through many media outlets. This constant bombardment of the doctrine of evolution is a poison to be avoided. Consider Jesus' challenging question, 'However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:8). Cp. *B.S.*, 1996, p.152, in comment on the parallel passage in Matthew 13.

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: *Disaster and faith* Whenever suffering comes, whether from disasters or illnesses, especially when young children or babies are involved, it is very easy for God to become 'the whipping boy' to carry the blame. Human beings need someone or something to blame, which is quite clear in current world attitudes. And, if governments or authorities cannot be held to account, God is an easy target, sadly, for both believers and unbelievers, for suffering can often shake our faith.

Isaiah 53 says: 'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows' (ESV) where 'griefs' can be translated as 'sicknesses' (*Strong's Concordance*), which illuminates the effect that illness has on the heart of God. The Lord Jesus felt keenly the pain of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:13) and the distress of the desperate woman and grief-stricken Jairus (Luke 8). Here in Luke 13 He is not unmoved by the deaths of so many, nor by the cruelty of Pilate; but He seeks to show the questioners that these things happened as a result of man's sinfulness—i.e. that of Pilate and presumably the carelessness of the builders of the tower—not the sinfulness of those who died. This mistake of thinking that all ill-health or suffering comes purely through the sin of those affected is seen in Job 4:7, as Eliphaz seeks to persuade Job to admit his assumed faults, something that God refutes in chapter 42:7-8.

In Job's case Satan was instrumental in bringing upon Job his dreadful suffering. Certainly God allowed it, but Satan incited it. We see another example of Satan's vindictiveness in the woman in Luke 13, where Jesus shows that she had been 'bound' for 18 years by satanic power. When we look at Mark 4:39 where Jesus rebukes the wind as He calms the storm on the lake, surely it is inconceivable that He would rebuke something that the Father had brought about; rather we see how Satan was again seeking to destroy what God was working in this world.

Of course human suffering can come about through God's purposes: Exodus 4 shows that God does indeed make man 'mute or deaf or seeing or blind'. However, John 9:3 makes it clear that such things are often to show 'the works of God'—something that is far from easy to accept or bear—and the trials of 1 Peter 1:5-7 can also be used to 'prove the genuineness of faith'. It has also to be admitted

that some illnesses, and even disasters, are caused by man's disobedience and ignorance, here in the tower falling. In later times we look at the wreck of the Titanic and see man's carelessness and pride overriding 'best practice'—hardly the fault of a loving God! For all right-thinking people we recognise the hazards of smoking, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and alcohol abuse—things that make sin in the human heart such a destructive and powerful agent of painful and distressing things.

Thankfully we can look to God and see that He is indeed the 'Father of mercies and God of all comfort' (2 Cor. 1:3) who cares deeply for us and provides the strength and support we need in all our afflictions in life [Comment 2].

Edwin Stanley

From Belfast: *Helping those who doubt God* In life we have mountain-top experiences and low valley appearances; yet God's word speaks of giving thanks and praising Him in all seasons of life (Phil. 1:29). When in the valleys we may experience guilt for doubting God's promises to bring us through trials (1 Pet. 1:6-7), creating a drift farther away from God—something which Satan loves.

So how can we help? The first thing we have to recognise is that this is the journey of those who doubt God because of suffering. We need to understand where they are on this path and encourage them to pray (James 5:13). They travel on this journey at their own pace, with the apostle Paul's goal in view that one day they will rejoice in their sufferings (Rom. 5:3), but only at their appointed time of acceptance and not ours! We share in their burdens (Gal. 6:2) by listening and remembering that if one suffers then we too should share in this with them (1 Cor. 12:26).

Will this be more than they can bear? For certain the truth is that their suffering will not be more than He, the Lord, can bear (1 Pet. 5:6-7) as they are to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, casting all their anxieties on Him and He will sustain them (Ps. 55:22). At this point they may be able heartily to quote the poem:

So whether on all the hilltops, high and fair,
I dwell, or in the sunless valley where
The shadows lie—what matters? He is there.
So where He leads me, I can safely go;
And in the blessed hereafter I shall know
Why, in His wisdom, He hath led me so.

(John F. Chaplain)

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *Helping sufferers who doubt God* Pontius Pilate had ruthlessly violated the most sacred aspect of Jewish life—he had mingled the Galileans’ blood with their sacrifices. This was an act of such savagery that many were asking ‘why?’ A tower in Siloam had recently collapsed, killing eighteen unfortunates. This question often arises after such incidents, ‘why has God allowed this to happen?’ The immediate thought of the Jewish mind was to assign guilt to the victims of these incidents.

The Lord Jesus quashed such ideas by ruling out the possibility of greater or lesser culpability. Instead, He invites us to look beyond such shallow thinking and asks us to consider something even more awful—the dreadful truth that those who die without repenting of their sins will perish just as suddenly and finally. It was Jesus who warned men about the eternal, unquenchable fire (Mat. 25:41; Mark 9:45). The idea that there could ever be any unrighteousness on God’s part is completely contrary to Scripture, for ‘God is light, and in him is no darkness at all’ (1 John 1:5 ESV). Furthermore, ‘... love is from God’ and ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:7-8). All true love emanates from God because love is the very essence of His nature.

The stark reality is that ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23). As children of Adam we are sinners by nature and rebels against our Creator. As such we are completely dependent upon His mercy and on His means of redemption, which is through faith in His Son, who died for us as a sin-atonement sacrifice on the cross.

Western European culture appears to have largely rejected the authority of God’s word, replacing it instead with a relativism in which moral judgements are based, not on the inerrant word of a holy and righteous God, but on flawed and fluid personal feelings, the emotions and whims of a degenerate society. It wishes to re-make God in its own image rather than giving Him His rightful place. We must resist such wrong ideas about God, for He is supreme in ‘glory, majesty, dominion and authority’ (Jude v.25).

As disciples of the Christ of the Bible, we know that God is the divine Potter and we are the clay. We have no right to question His motives or actions any more than a piece of pottery has the right to say to the potter, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ For us, therefore, the only way to make sense of life’s hard questions is to humbly acknowledge that while we don’t have all the answers, we owe our very existence to God who ‘is love’, and that our present and eternal wellbeing depends on how we respond to His way of salvation as revealed in the inspired Word.

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: *Those who doubt God because of suffering* The Lord was told about the Galileans who suffered the vicious cruelty of Pilate, and adduced Himself the fate of those on whom the tower fell in Siloam, but assured His listeners that in neither case were they special sinners. His words are of general application: accidents do happen. In our own time thousands of people die in road accidents, and sometimes people are taken away when they are much needed here, but the reply to this is 'What do you expect God to do? To intervene to prevent all driving error or carelessness, or to ensure that no-one has any bodily weakness?' God has the power to do these things, but if He were to do them the world would be peopled by automata, and God really wants the willing submission of mankind to His permissive will. Suffering is real, both by those who undergo it and those who are affected by it; but it can bring the sufferers closer to God both in trust and in repentance, as the Lord Himself said.

The barren fig tree The primary application of this parable was to Israel, who were favoured with three years of the Lord's ministry; but it is of continued relevance. The fig tree was planted in a corner of a vineyard, whose primary purpose was to produce grapes; it was expected to bear fruit, and if it did not it was useless, for it would be no good for wood. Similarly, God's present-day people, planted in an alien world, are expected by Him to produce fruit. What is this fruit? It might be narrowly defined as bringing people to trust in Christ; but it is not only that. God's people have the Spirit of God, and 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness' (Gal. 5:22 ESV).

Parables of the kingdom The similarity between verses 19-21 and Matthew 13:31-33 leads one to conclude that there is no difference in the Gospels between the expressions 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven'. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that 'kingdom of heaven' is found in 31 verses in Matthew, but in no other Gospel, whilst 'kingdom of God' appears 54 times in the Gospels. However, this matter merits separate discussion [Comment 3].

The similarity of the two parables of vv.19 and 21 lies in the fact that they both portend the future pervasive nature of the kingdom of God. As the small mustard seed produced a plant which was the largest of the herbs, so a small amount of yeast leavens the whole lump. That is, the gospel of Christ would spread over the whole world.

Peter Hickling

From Derby: *On the account of suffering in Luke 13* It is not easy to help people who seem to have no release from suffering. What we can do is listen and try to understand, for understanding will make our prayers concise and specific. For Job, all his friends could do at first was be silent, for they had never seen someone become so different in appearance. It was noted that in the letters that Paul wrote there is surprisingly little about people who are unwell: the letters are about how we are in the churches as Christians. In trials and in sicknesses praying to God over ill persons helps all to realise that they may not be able to do any more, but God can.

The fig tree is like some of God's people, planted by God, yet not yielding fruit. The vineyard keeper is like one of the prophets who knew the condition of God's people and was able to plead for mercy, having time to feed them with the right food to give them another chance. In Jeremiah 2:21 we read, 'Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?' (AV) God planted His people in Egypt [Surely Canaan is intended?—Eds.] and now they had turned into the degenerate plant that would not yield its fruit. There are lessons here for us all: if we will not produce fruit after being given every chance, our lives of service will be cut down and we shall no longer be of use to God.

The kingdom of God is like the tree and also like the leaven that affects the whole lump. It only requires a small amount to make a big difference. Where God reigns in our lives it truly brings change all around. Over our lives we have seen people who are close to God: it really does make a difference! When we see Peter's firm belief as to who Jesus is, this is like our foundation as believers; and as Jesus told Peter that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it we know that we are on a firm footing. At Pentecost all believers gathered together in Jerusalem and were made to form the church of God there all in the kingdom of God. Like the tree we need to carry out the will of God to the best of our ability. When the kingdom grows and flourishes it attracts others to nest in its branches.

The narrow door is the way to life. Jesus Himself could say, 'I am the door'. Yet sadly many will seek an alternative way and not find entry. In Matthew 7:13 Jesus appeals to all to enter through the narrow gate. We see also the camel entering through the needle's eye, and in order to get through it has to shed its burden. This is the same for us who believe that Jesus is the door; we have laid our burdens at the cross. The kingdom of God today is wherever God's rule is regarded and exercised among disciples obedient to the pattern of service shown in His word (2 Tim. 1:13-14).

Robert Foster

From Greenock: *The fig tree bearing no fruit* The land of Israel, misnamed 'Palestine' for 1,800 years, was a barren wasteland during the long centuries that the Jewish people were exiled and scattered across the earth. Denuded of trees which caused further erosion, the land was also plagued by malarial swamps. It became a byword for destitution, a land which no one cared for, owned by absentee foreign landlords. Situated at the 'centre' of the earth, the eyes of the Jewish people, down the long centuries that they lived in exile, constantly turned towards it. Their hearts yearned for their ancient homeland. God had not forgotten His land and was waiting for the appointed time to restore it.

A withered fig tree in a blighted land is a good illustration of the Jewish people from their exile in the Diaspora from 70 AD, and their final expulsion from the land in 135 AD. But, just as God will make the dry bones live (Ezek. 37) so the parable of the fig tree is indicative of new life in the Jewish people since their return to the land from the 1880s, and of Israel when it was reborn as a nation in 1948.

God was always looking for fruit from His people, but He was often disappointed. He looked for good grapes, but the fruit was bad (Is. 5:4). Similarly, Jesus described Himself as the Vine looking for fruit from believers and often finding none. The fig tree in His day was withered from its roots. God asked, 'what more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it (Is. 5:4 NIV)? Jesus said 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees' (Luke 21:29), perhaps having Israel and the nations in mind. The context of these verses is of the time when the nation of Israel is back in their land and looking forward to the end-times in which the Rapture will have taken place, and the Lord's coming to earth to reign as King Messiah. The long winter of Jewish exile has passed and the fig tree (Israel) is putting forth her leaves, blossoming and filling the world with fruit (Is. 27:6). It is a fact beyond dispute that the land of Israel only prospers when it is being cared for by the Jewish people. The fig tree (Israel) is now fully ripe and is leading the world, not only in fruit production but also in many other fields such as agriculture, technology, science, etc. Another spreading leaf of the fig tree was the revival of the Hebrew language, because the reborn nation needed a unifying tongue.

Since the ingathering of the exiles began, through the rebirth of Israel in 1948 and the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, the fig tree, once withered from its roots, has been growing and spreading her leaves, its fruit being a blessing to the world [Comment 4]. Mankind owes a debt of gratitude and love for all the blessings that have come from God through His ancient people Israel. If there were no Israel there would be no Church which is the Body of Christ, for the nation of Israel has been the

conduit through which God's richest blessings have come to the world—salvation through Israel's Messiah, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the service of God and the promises (Rom. 9:4); through such as Paul came the revelation that saved Jews and Gentiles are one in the Body of Christ, and by obedience to the revealed will of God can serve God in His house, the Churches of God in the New Testament.

John Peddie

From Halifax: *Except ye repent* At the occasion of Jesus' discourse to the great multitude (see Luke 12:1), some told Him of certain Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices (13:1). Although a number of commentators have supposed that these were followers of Judas, a Gaulonite, [Comment 5] who is mentioned by Josephus (Antiquities XVIII i 1) and believed to be the Judas of Galilee in Acts 5:37, this is not at all certain.

If by relating this appalling news it had been thought to stir Jesus of Galilee to involve Himself in revolutionary comment, then they were mistaken. Matthew Henry correctly notes that 'Christ was now going up to Jerusalem, *to be delivered into the hands of Pilate*, and to have His blood, not mingled with His sacrifice, but itself made a sacrifice' (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*). On the contrary, Jesus, affirming the sinfulness of all men (Luke 13:5), used this news, along with the disastrous collapse of the tower in Siloam (v.4) to impress upon them their need of repentance.

A mustard seed The immediate healing of the woman in the synagogue (v.13) shows that Jesus was acting with God's authority, whom she was caused to glorify (Gk. *edoxazen*). The ruler of the synagogue, however, was 'indignant' at this miracle being done on the Sabbath. 'You hypocrites!' said Jesus (v.15 ESV). The people then rejoiced at the 'glorious things' (Gk. *endoxois*) that were done by Jesus.

Having asked them about the kingdom of God (v.18) Jesus compared it to a grain of mustard seed cast into a garden (v.19). Writing of Jesus, George Prasher explains, 'He must Himself, like the mustard seed, fall into the ground and die before the great purpose of the millennial kingdom could be brought about' (*Needed Truth* Dec. 1991). That tiny seed grew and waxed into a great tree.

Robert J. Butler

From Mount Forest: *Suffering and personal responsibility* Two mistakes, when dealing with other people in their suffering, are to assume that it either always reflects divine punishment of bad behaviour or it should otherwise just be accepted as for their good (relying on Rom. 8:28). A worse mistake is self-righteously to assume we

avoid suffering by our goodness. By inference, the Galileans of Luke 13:1 and those bereaved by the tower's fall could have been seen by onlookers as suffering because of guilt. However, the Lord warned His audience that they were in no position to make comparisons favourable to themselves, and without repentance they would 'likewise perish'. The latter does not mean they would have a tower fall on them; rather the point being made is as observed in John 3:18,36; 5:24—all initially stand condemned. 'Likewise' is explained by Luke's use in e.g. Luke 6:31 or 16:25, meaning correspondingly, not just identically. The Lord referred to the corresponding fact of them perishing rather than the manner of bodily suffering they would endure. Proverbs describe normal cause and effect, but they permit exceptions or delayed fulfilment. Therefore, proverbial concepts, as in Job 4:7 or Psalm 37:25, must be balanced by the appeals of the 'innocent' for God to act and not delay (e.g. Ps. 70:5), or even imprecations as in Psalm 109.

If 'these things' of Romans 8:31 applies to the 'all things' of Romans 8:28 then we must apply 'all things working together for good' to the eternity-to-eternity purposes of God of verses 29 and 30, not just to present day-to-day sufferings. However, a good answer to keep us from doubting God because of earthly suffering, will have to include a wider perspective.. There are many types of suffering that cannot be corrected during the sufferer's lifetime on earth, e.g. loss of a loved one or accidental severe injuries. Rather than blame God for such events—as though He intentionally causes all such suffering—it is necessary to bring into the explanation both the overriding consequences of original sin (the essential cause of virtually all present suffering), and the perfect justice of God. The latter importantly is not restricted to our earthly life: He can take vengeance on wrongdoers who have afflicted us even after they die. Otherwise, how can even capital punishment for a serial killer be sufficient or just, taking only one life for many lost? And God knows how to bless forever those who suffered for a time here (e.g. 2 Thes.1:4-10; 2 Cor. 4:17; Rev. 7:14-15).

The parable of the fig tree Luke notably juxtaposes the account in 13:1-5 with the parable of 13:6-9, for human failure may require painful divine intervention. Mercy is expressed in giving time to become fruitful, but when the axe falls it is a necessary consequence. John 15:2 is comparable. 1 Cor. 11:29-30 is instructive. Beyond the simple agricultural metaphor in Luke 13 and John 15 is the detail of a 'vine' and a 'fig tree. Along with the olive tree, these are depictions of the people of God (Rom.11:24; Mat. 24:32; Ps. 80:8). Therefore, the application of Luke 13:6-9 to the present-day people of God, or an individual church of God, bears careful consideration. Self- examination is always a right response to suffering.

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: *Parable of the fig tree* In the parable of the barren fig tree our Lord speaks regarding the penalty of being useless and fruitless. There is both a national and a personal application in this parable (Mat. 21:43). Christ was speaking to the nation of Israel in declaring that Israel had one more opportunity to bear fruit to the glory of God. We need to approach this parable with an honest mind and a prayerful heart. We will look at the following lessons, drawing, in part, from the *Aletheia Chronicle* website:

(1) *This parable speaks of God's absolute ownership.* The Bible tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. He placed humans on the earth to subdue and develop it. He did not give the earth to them: the world still belongs to God. The psalmist said, 'The earth is the LORD's and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein' (Ps. 24:1NKJV). Isaiah told the people of Israel a parable about a vineyard (Is. 5:1-7). The owner of the vineyard did everything he could to make it productive. In the parable of the barren fig tree Jesus speaks a similar message to the Israel of His day: He speaks of the owner of the vineyard who had for three years sought fruit on the certain fig tree during harvest time, only to find it barren, and decided that the fig tree should be destroyed. He put to the man who was in charge of caring for the vineyard a question that has an application for us today: after issuing an order to cut the tree he asked, 'Why does it use up the ground?' The vine-dresser still had hope for figs, and he suggested that it be given one more year of opportunity to bear fruit for the glory of God.

(2) *This parable speaks of God's right to expect fruit.* After the fig tree had been planted for a sufficient length of time to bear fruit, the owner came expecting to find some in three successive years, only to be disappointed repeatedly. Not only was he indeed disappointed, but he decided that the tree had no right to continue to survive. God has a right to expect fruit from His vineyard: He is the vine and His disciples are the branches. 'He who abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing' (John 15:5, cp. 8,16) [Comment 6].

(3) *The parable speaks of the patience of God.* On three different years He came to the vineyard expecting fruit from the fig tree before deciding to have it cut down. Because of the intercession of the vine-dresser the owner consented to give the fig tree one more year of opportunity. Jesus was teaching that God is patient, both with the nation and with the individual, and that He will give them another opportunity.

(4) *The parable speaks of the decisive firmness of God.* He who bears no fruit is a parasite. God is patient, but there is a limit to that patience. The fig tree was given

another chance but there was the possibility of the owner of the vineyard cutting it down: God's judgments are rooted in righteousness. The unsaved about us are a total loss to God: they bear no fruit to His glory and are in peril of experiencing His judgment. Because the mercy of God is still available to them, and because of our concern for them, we should seek to persuade them to respond to the love of God that they might experience the joy of fruit-bearing.

B.V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: *The fig tree's special lesson* Fig trees are planted in vineyards in both Israel and Egypt. One has to cultivate the fig tree with more care in rocky soil for several years. People took rest safely under grape vines and fig trees in the days of Solomon (1 Kin. 4:25;). Leaves of fig trees are used to wrap fresh fruits nowadays. In the beginning God covered the bodies of the first sinners with fig leaves by His kindness (Gen. 3:7). [Adam and Eve covered themselves with the fig leaves; God's covering was of skins by the shedding of blood (Gen. 3:21)—Eds.].

The prayer of Habakkuk is notable about unblossomed fig trees (3:17-18). God compares the stars of heaven falling like untimely figs (not ripe) when the sixth seal is opened at the end time (Rev. 6:13). God showed Jeremiah two baskets of fig fruits in his dream (Jer. 24:3) but there were none for His son Jesus when He sought them (Mark 11:13). Dry figs are used as food and gifts. Abigail sent 200 cakes of figs as a precious gift to David and became the source of peace (1 Sam. 25:18). A lump of figs was used as a plaster on Hezekiah's boil (Is. 38:21).

The unfruitful fig tree is the symbol of destruction of the country (Jer. 5:17). The fruitlessness of Israel, and its doom if it did not produce fruit 'this year', illustrates the period of Jesus' ministry of three years up to now; and 'this year' indicates the remaining half year of His ministry and life. (The owner visited the tree each of the three years and couldn't find fruit.) While talking about a fig tree the people of Israel are in the mind of Jesus. Here the owner of the fig tree is God, and the gardener of the vineyard denotes shepherds or Jesus himself. God is removing some people from His vineyard and has been waiting with patience for some time for others. Every unfruitful tree is in danger (Mat. 3:10; John 15:2,6). The people who are not fruitful to God are unnecessarily occupied with some part of the earth. Is it necessary for God to let them continue on it? God wanted to get rid of them for being useless to Him. The gardener pleaded with the master for judgement to be delayed for at least a year. In this time if the fig tree started producing fruit he would be the cause of cancelling judgement forever (see Ex. 32:7-14. If Jesus has not been praying steadfastly for us, what would be our fate (See Rom. 8:34 and Heb. 7:25?) [Cp. Comment 6].

Matthew Henry's commentary says that this parable is intended to reinforce the warning given just before—the barren tree, except it bring forth its fruit, will be cut down. Though it is for Jews, it is also without doubt for awakening all who enjoy the means of grace and the privileges of the visible church. When God has borne long we may hope that He will bear with us yet a little longer; but we cannot expect that He will do so forever.

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *Helping suffering doubters* Suffering, in its diverse forms, is a terrible reality for very many people. In some, it instils a sense of hopelessness and worthlessness. Many cannot reconcile the idea of a benevolent God with the seeming meaninglessness of suffering. Perhaps the most galling aspect of suffering is when the good and innocent bear the brunt of it. Such was the case, arguably, regarding the eighteen on whom the tower fell at Siloam and the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1-2). The Lord Jesus Christ in His comments on these two events headlined a key factor in suffering: bad things do not necessarily happen only to bad people. Indeed, it is noted in several parts of Scripture that there seems to be grave injustice in the matter of suffering. Asaph observed: 'For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men' (Ps. 73:3-5 NKJV).

Scripture is clear about the origin of suffering being the Fall in the garden of Eden, which impacted not only mankind but also the physical and natural world: 'Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you ... in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground ... for dust you are and to dust you shall return' (Gen. 3:17-19). Suffering in the world is not caused by God but by the consequences of the Fall and the natural predisposition of mankind, apart from the grace of God, to do evil: 'Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Gen. 6:5). As it was then, so it is now. Evil men in power make laws that affect people and cause suffering; unscrupulous men in business in pursuit of gain cause suffering to unsuspecting people. Natural disasters wreak havoc and cause untold hardship; and the list is endless.

If, however, God is good and all-powerful why does He then not intervene to avert or bring an end to suffering? God indeed is good and all-powerful and both history and present experience show that He does from time to time intervene in human

affairs to stamp His authority (Dan. 4:17, 34-37). It is not the norm, however. The idea sown by the devil is that men can run their lives without God's guidance. Yet since God created man and gave him free will, He does not override man's will in the ordinary course of things.

God, nevertheless, is a sufferer. He feels keenly the sufferings of all His creation in whatever form it might be (Is. 63:9). And, to restore men to His original plan, God sent His Son to redeem them through His death on the cross. None has suffered the way God and His Son did when Jesus died: 'Therefore in all things, he had to be made like His brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted' (Heb. 2:16-18).

Finally, it is not always the case that God exercises His power to bring an end to suffering. A constant truth, however, is that to those who trust Him He has assured His presence and comfort in suffering: 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble' (Ps. 46:1).

Frederick F. Ntido

From Trinidad, Colorado: *How is the kingdom of God like the tree (13:19) and the leaven (13:21)?* The kingdom of God is described as a tree that grew from 'a grain of mustard seed' (Luke 13:19 ESV) and also as 'leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened' (v.21). Here Jesus describes the characteristics of the kingdom using small, everyday actions that could be easily related to. The kingdom grows from something small and humble to something so large that it can no longer be ignored; from a mustard seed into a tree in which birds might take shelter and nest, or from a bit of leaven that soon spreads throughout all the measures of flour. This growth takes time but is promised by the word of Jesus Himself.

As we await His coming kingdom, it is easy to grow impatient or weary in the midst of darkness and adversity. Yet we should consider the humble beginnings of Abram in Genesis 15:1-6: the Lord promised that this childless man who had no heir was yet destined to have offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abram then believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

We similarly live with the patient expectation of the growth of God's kingdom, ushered in by Jesus in the most unexpected and humble of ways, but backed with the

certainly of the fulfilment of God's promises for our eternal life with Him. The darkness and resistance Christians face today is countered by the expectation of God's perfect righteousness, guaranteed to be fully realized throughout all of creation. Nevertheless disciples need to be committed to obedience to Jesus as Lord before the kingdom can be expressed in lives of service in this present world (Mat. 21:43; 28:19-20). May God's kingdom come, His will be done (Mat. 6:10)!

Jude Hoffpauir

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): *Yeast or leaven and the kingdoms of heaven and of God* The points in the next paragraph are quite persuasive in themselves, except regarding leaven. But since the Lord compares the kingdom to the seed and to the yeast, we must interpret each picture as describing the purpose and blessing of the kingdom itself, not evil that arises within, and should be purged out according to the laws of the kingdom. Two notable exceptions to leaven representing sin are that it was accepted (and required) in certain Old Testament offerings: the peace offering (Lev. 7:13) and with firstfruits (Lev. 23:17).

M.A.

The parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30 is given in relation to the kingdom of heaven, which we understand to be a different entity from the kingdom of God. In Matthew 13, the mustard seed was sown in the field, for the sphere of the kingdom of heaven is the world, where evil is for now is permitted to exist. In Luke 13, however, the seed was sown in the garden, for this parable speaks of the kingdom of God (see 1 Cor. 3:9, where Paul describes the church of God in Corinth (as in every church of God) as His 'tilled land'). It is instructive that the parable of the weeds is not used to describe the kingdom of God, in respect of which we have clear teaching that evil may not reside there (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The mustard seed and the leaven were both imperceptible things, almost invisible to the human eye, and yet they have an irresistible influence. They speak of the kingdom of God, whose influence shall in time fill the world. There can be no part of the dough which is not leavened by proving, just as the mustard tree outgrows all the plants of the garden to provide shelter for the birds. I take it that the birds speak of the peoples of the nations who will eventually find their shelter in the branches of

the worldwide kingdom established by the Lord when He is finally revealed (cp. Dan. 4:20-22). See also *B.S.* 1957, p.36.

J.T.N.

2. (Aberkenfig): Our brother's exposition and explanation of Scripture relating to instances of God's purpose and will in contradistinction to Satan's malicious designs in the vagaries of human experiences and occurrences of natural phenomena is to be commended.

R.B.F.

3. (Cromer): *The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God* Similarity in one aspect between two things is no grounds for assuming they are the same. As Dr Doodson commented in *B.S.* 1957, 'This is a very elementary logical principle ... Many people and things are similar in many respects, but it is in their dissimilarities that we are able to detect a difference. So indeed it is with the kingdom of God and of heaven ... The same things may be said of both kingdoms without implying that they are the same' (pp.179-180).

Comment 1 above already identifies one difference between the parable of the mustard seed as told by Matthew and by Luke, in that one was sown in the field and one in the garden, a Scriptural distinction which is traced back to Eden (Gen. 2:8; 3:1). Furthermore, the fact that only Matthew refers to the kingdom of heaven is no basis for assuming this was his unique terminology for the same thing, since he had no difficulty in referring to the kingdom of God (e.g. Mat. 21:43 where reference to the kingdom of God, rather than the kingdom of heaven, is surely extremely significant). Elsewhere the differences between the two kingdoms are so readily apparent that it seems to me unsustainable to argue they are the same. John Miller's series of articles about the kingdom of heaven in *B.S.* 1957 are immensely helpful in this regard.

J.T.N.

The differences between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven have been well documented in this magazine over its lifetime, and can be easily accessed by consulting the four *Bible Studies* Index Supplements covering the years 1921-2016.

R.B.F.

4. (Greenock): Surely the Lord expected a great deal more from Israel following His ministry, and that of His apostles, including His death and resurrection, than 20th century recovery of productivity of the material land? The principal message of the fig

tree is the spiritual response of the soul to the message of the Messiah, and of service to the kingdom. The nation of Israel today include comparatively few who believe in the truths listed in the paper's last paragraph.

5. (Halifax): 'Gaulonite' comes from the location of Gamala, origin of the Judas Josephus refers to, in the Roman province of Gaulonitis. We agree the connection with Pilate's atrocity is doubtful.

6. (Podagatla): Comparison with the parable of the vine in John 15, which concerns the believer's fruitfulness, raises the possibility of the believer's life of service being ended, like the condition of the soul in 1 Corinthians 3:15 which is saved, but as through fire. This is possible indeed, depicted in the unfruitful branch being cut off and burned up (John 15:6), but the fig tree here is a different picture, referring primarily to Israel as a nation, though individuals of any age can rightly take warning from the judgement in which the tree is entirely removed from a privileged place.

M.A.

COVERS FOR 2018

Again we are indebted to Kevin Jones of Vancouver for preparing the layout and graphics. The view on the front is of the northern coast of Lake Galilee, taken from the east and looking towards Capernaum, with Mt. Arbel reaching southwards. On the back: an ancient olive press in Jerusalem.

Editors

MEASURING PROFIT AND LOSS IN DISCIPLESHIP

Appealing to the Romans to leave behind the sin which blighted their lives and live instead for God as instruments for righteousness, Paul reminded them of all that had been done for them in Christ. Their old selves had been crucified with Him that they might die with Him; and in baptism they had been buried with Him that they too might be raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-8). Those things having been irreversibly accomplished, Paul's plea was to 'consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus' (6:11 ESV).

The word 'consider' is *logizomai*, an accounting term meaning 'to reckon by calculation'. This was a call for them to appraise the facts in black and white, as an accountant reviews the books, and make a reasoned assessment of the impact which the work of the Lord must have on their lives. Was that assessment not precisely what the Lord Himself demanded as He described the man who built the tower, and the king who went to war (Luke 14:28-32)? Surely no sensible man would launch himself into such a project without first calculating both the cost and his own means to meet it.

Now, He says, apply that principle to discipleship, and He sets out the cost. It is a high cost, for it is to 'renounce all' (Luke 14:33). If the meaning of that were not clear enough—if we were inclined to question its severity, or temper its interpretation by qualifications of our own invention—its meaning is graphically illustrated: it is to throw over the most precious of family ties (v.26) to take them up again under His direction and disclaim every trace of dignity and self-worth in the eyes of the world, like a man bearing the instrument of his own execution before a hostile crowd to the place of utter degradation (v.27).

There, in this great 'profit and loss' account, the loss is plainly stated. No one could accuse the Lord of mis-selling! And yet when it came to balancing the books, Paul had no doubt where the profit was to be found: 'For I consider (*logizomai*) that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us' (Rom. 8:18). This wasn't a blind hope that things would work out in the end. This was Paul's educated and reasoned assessment of the value of all that God has accomplished and promised

through the person and work of His Son, set against the loss which would accrue to him in his discipleship of the Lord. There is no question that, in the eyes of the world, his loss was great; and yet his gain was unaccountably more, for 'I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him' (Phil. 3:8-9).

The world also makes these assessments. It has assessed the one we serve, for Luke himself records it: 'He was numbered (*logizomai*) with the transgressors' (Luke 22:37). They saw Him, heard Him, watched Him, and still in their abject blindness they accounted the Holy One condemned

as a transgressor of the Law. And yet to us comes the great appeal of Romans 12, that our response to His renunciation of Himself at Calvary must be to 'present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God'. Why? Because this is your 'rational (*logikos*) service' (ESV margin). Like the settled accounts of the builder, or the military strategy of the king, the sacrifice of all is the considered response of one who has measured the cost against an eternal weight of glory. If giving up all still seems too high a loss to suffer, the reason can only be that, as yet, we've gained no grasp at all of the profit.

J.T.N.

From Study Groups

THE NATURE OF DISCIPLESHIP (Luke 14)

From Aberdeen: The Lord sets out conditions for true discipleship in the context of Israel's general rejection of Him as the Messiah (Luke 14:26). The Lord had already indicated that His rejection at Jerusalem was near at hand (13:34). Indeed, His discipleship challenge is again picked up in 14:15-24, through the parable of the great supper, in which the refusals of the invited guests are mirrored by Israel's unwillingness to receive Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. The challenge to the crowds who went with Him toward Jerusalem was that they followed one who was about to be crucified. Anyone who would truly be His disciple must be prepared to follow in His steps [Comment 1]. In this context, there is a reality check for those with the misapprehension that Jesus Christ was about to 'redeem Israel' (24:21 RV). The challenge rings out to the present day, that if we would truly follow the Saviour we must settle within our hearts the renouncement of all we possess. The Lord's words

bring before us His complete unselfishness and total surrender to the will of God. His example reminds us that, 'he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren' (1 John 3:16).

Paul is an example of true Christian discipleship. His attitude of mind was one of being yielded to God. He had learned how to be content in every circumstance (Phil. 4:11-13). Things which had once been gain to him he counted but loss for Christ (3:7). Paul learned to have a disciplined attitude. Such an attitude reflected Paul's happy relationship with God; thus he accepted the Lord's answer to his prayer in trial—'My grace is sufficient for thee' (2 Cor. 12:9).

Salt and its saltiness While it is possible for a disciple of Christ to become an ineffective witness (like salt losing its saltiness), surely the point being made simply indicates a state of ineffective discipleship rather than necessarily an irreversible duration of ineffective discipleship [Comment 2]?

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: What was the purpose of this Pharisee inviting Jesus to 'eat bread' with the other Pharisees? He had accepted the invitation, presumably with His disciples. However, we are caused to question the motive behind the invitation. Was it to pick a quarrel with Him? The mindset of the Pharisees was such that they had wandered away from the whole purpose of the Law—but He 'knoweth the thoughts of man' (Ps. 94:11 RV; John 2:24-25). Before He displayed the wonderful healing on the man, He challenged the onlookers (lawyers and Pharisees) into silence. After the miraculous act, the Lord showed how misinformed they were in the application of the law to the Sabbath. Their tenacious hold on legal tradition kept them from grasping the spirit of God's law. Just to emphasise this, He uses similar words to those in the previous chapter when addressing the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 13:15) in God's provision of care for the animals (perhaps referring to provision in the law: Ex. 23:4-5 and Deut. 22:1-4). It was a rhetorical question and the grammar used indicates the appropriateness of an affirmative answer. The Lord's purpose in coming to earth was not to win arguments: He came to redeem people from their sins. Time and again He had said this to the Pharisees (and those with them). This had been forgotten by the Pharisees. Their tenacious hold on legal tradition prevented them from grasping the spirit of God's law and why He gave it. They were caught in Jesus' ethical 'checkmate', not once, but in a series of parables, six in all.

The Lord had been observing how they had chosen the chief seats and He adduced a proverb (Prov. 25:6-7). With the warning of the external consequences of pride, He

Himself would display in just a very short time the epitome of humility, subjecting Himself to the humiliation of the cross for the sake of humanity. We are reminded of the Lord's words recorded in Luke 6—if our service is to honour God and be a blessing to others then our motives must be pure.

Fellowship based on selfish competition is not Christian fellowship at all. After the interjection by one of the Pharisees the Lord replied with another parable in which a great feast had been prepared. The invitations had gone out to the guests—guests who were of some standing and influence. Tradition tells us that in that part of the world this would be the principal meal of the day, which was eaten towards evening (see Edersheim—*The Life and Times of Jesus, The Messiah*, Book 2, p.250). Those chief men of the city (to enhance the host's status) had accepted the initial invitation and the host had made preparations based on their RSVP. The host was justified in feeling angry when the servant returned with their replies. The first excused himself on the grounds that he had purchased a field and needed to see it, but transactions such as this were complicated and protracted. How could he examine his property in the dark? Is he going to see his possession that he may glory in it, as Nebuchadnezzar gloried, 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built ... by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' (Dan. 4:30). This was the lust of the eye and the pride of life!

The second invited guest came up with the excuse of having bought ten oxen and needing to prove them; but only a fool would buy these animals without testing them: it was an obvious investment for a farming operation; they needed to give a return. In both cases we are reminded of the virtuous woman referred to in Proverbs 31:16: 'She considereth a field, and buyeth it'. She does not, as the invited guests of the parable, buy it first and then inspect the purchase later. The third guest, according to Levitical law (Deut. 24:5) would have sufficient reason for not going into battle, but none at all why he shouldn't come to the feast. In fact, the first two men asked to be excused, with a courteous denial, but the third said, rather curtly, 'I cannot come', which was a cover-up for 'I will not'. The third man's wife had nothing to do with the event, for women were not usually invited to public feasts [Comment 3]. The host had every right to feel indignant and angry, so he opened his home to the least desirable and undeserving in the community—the very people Jesus had suggested (v.13,) namely the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind.

The Pharisees wrongly assumed that their Hebrew DNA would grant them automatic citizenship to the coming kingdom of God, and their own moral agenda would secure them seats of honour. The host in the parable is God. Entrance to the

banquet is by invitation only. God wants His house filled, and if those who are invited will not come, He will call others. God made laws because He loves mankind; but when man-made rules cause suffering, the heart of God is no longer reflected, and therefore we should re-examine them (vv.1-6). The world, the cares of business and the flesh will draw us away from the Master and our Christian walk of faith.

W. Paterson

From Belfast: Hate is a strong word, and certainly for the crowds to hear this Man of love speak in such a way would have arrested their thinking. Having previously described that coming to God was like accepting an invitation, Jesus was careful to add that there was more involved than simply accepting and becoming one of His followers. When we look at the love triangle involving Jacob, Rachel and Leah we are clearly told that 'Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah' and that Leah on the other hand was 'unloved' (Gen. 29:30,32 NIV). Rachel had been Jacob's choice from the beginning and he was in love with her. Indeed, he was willing to give another seven years of his life to Laban to win the love of his life. So too for believers on our Lord Jesus Christ, who are to 'hate' their parents in the sense that we love Christ even more (Mat. 10:37). Jesus is boldly saying that other relationships are of lower priority than faithfulness and obedience to God. There should be a marked difference in our allegiance to God from our allegiance to everyone and everything else. We are in a race and are to run as though we have not yet attained the prize (Phil. 3:13). For athletes the goal is the top spot on the podium: some may settle for second or third, but for followers of Jesus there is to be no second best. Our focus should be on the Captain of our faith, who is to be number one in our lives.

'And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:27). Disciples in Galilee knew what the cross meant since hundreds of men would have been executed this way in their region. To see a man carry his cross meant that it was a one way journey with no turning back, as this would ultimately end in his death. So it is for the followers of Jesus where the taking up of one's own cross symbolises the necessity of total commitment, self-denial, complete dedication and willing obedience. Luke emphasises that this is to be a continued action, with the insertion of the word 'daily' in 9:23.

Jesus does not want a blind, naive commitment that expects only blessings. As a builder estimates cost or a king evaluates military strength, so a person must consider what Jesus expects of His followers [Comment 4].

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: In Luke 14:26,33 the Lord is not saying we should harbour hatred in the sense of animosity towards kith and kin. Rather, when forced to choose between love for blood relations and love for the Lord, He must always come first. We have a striking example of this in His own life. During one of His teaching sessions someone informed Him that His mother and brothers were waiting to speak to Him. Instead of stopping what He was doing and going off to speak to them, He used the interruption to emphasise the paramount importance of obedience to the will of God. 'And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Mat. 12:49-50 RV).

This in no way contradicts what He said to the Pharisees when He rebuked them for teaching men to prioritise financial giving in favour of God, regardless of practical support. Children were obliged by the law of Moses to provide for their parents: 'you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition' (Mark 7:12-13 ESV) [Comment 5].

Here we see the perfect balance which the Lord Himself maintained between honouring God and honouring His earthly parents. Scriptures which further illustrate this balance are: 'he was subject unto them' (Luke 2:51), and at the wedding in Cana in Galilee. 'Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come' (John 2:4). Yet, from the cross, He ensured His mother would be cared for when so touchingly He said to John, 'Behold, thy mother!' (John 19:27).

But nothing and no one, not even His own mother, could hold Him back or prevent Him from doing the will of God. This is the uncompromising message He taught about discipleship: it is all or nothing. 'Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:33). 'No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other' (Mat. 6:24).

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: In Luke 14:25-33, Jesus repeats the warning He had given to His disciples earlier when He had advised them of the cost of following Him (9:23). This time there were crowds travelling with Jesus, and He would be aware that they were not all fully committed to His teaching. There would be those who had witnessed His healing powers, who had listened to His parables, who were out to discredit Him, who were considering His teaching and perhaps those who just 'followed the crowd', not being aware of what all the fuss was about. Jesus was making them aware of the

total commitment needed if they were to be His true followers. He uses strong words to impress on them that both His teaching and God's will must always take precedence over any other demands. Many would have strong family ties, but this was not to hold them back if they were to follow Him.

In Matthew 10:37-39, which is one of the earliest mentions of the cross, Jesus told His disciples that in their service for Him they would have to make sacrifices and encounter trials; but this would be necessary in their commitment to Him. So in Luke's Gospel, the same message is given to those who were with Him, and that same message still applies today. In our perception, present day commitments and loyalties may seem greater than those confronting the people in Luke's day, but in reality they were just as important. Jesus impressed on the people what would be involved in their commitment to Him and encouraged them to consider the consequences by giving the scenarios of the man building the tower and the king going to war. Our commitment to following the Lord must not be undertaken lightly or without the consideration of how it will affect our lives [see Comment 5].

How often have we seen young people commit themselves to Him only to be unable to fulfil that commitment in future years? We need continually to strengthen our resolve and encourage others to make sure Christ is at the forefront of their lives.

David Hickling

From Derby: *In verses 1-14 the three lessons are:*

- (1) a compassion to be shown on the Sabbath;
- (2) the exercise of humility rather than of self-exaltation; and
- (3) refusing to show respect of persons.

Compassion on the Sabbath It would appear that as the Lord was in this house the 'lawyers and Pharisees' were maliciously watching Him. The word is *paratereo* (from *parab* 'alongside', and *tereo* 'to observe, watch') and denotes ill (see *Adam Clarke's commentary*). It would appear that this Pharisee had invited the Lord to come into his house in order to observe Him privately [Comments 6 and 9].

'Probably the insidious Pharisee had brought this dropsical man to the place, not doubting that our Lord's eye would affect his heart, and that he would instantly cure him; and then he could most plausibly accuse him for a breach of the Sabbath. If this were the case, and it is likely, how deep must have been the perfidy and malice of the Pharisee!' (Adam Clarke). The Lord, knowing the intent of their hearts, asks, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?' (Luke 14:3 NASV). Then in verse 5 He

points out that it is not sinful to have compassion on the Sabbath, or indeed on any other day.

Respect of persons In verses 12-14, the Lord is pointing out that the Pharisees were not to show respect of persons in their dealings with others. It should also go without saying that in seeking to witness to the unsaved we are not to show respect of persons. We must be prepared to deal with the lowest to the highest equally on the same basis.

The matter of excuse makers and substitutes pointed to the nation of Israel at that time. The Lord was indicating here that Jehovah was about to start dealing with Gentiles as well as with Israel. It also has an application to us today. Is it possible that our conduct in the Churches of God today could be such that God would seek others to bear the 'torch'? On the other hand, the thought was expressed that this is typical of many who reject the offer of God's mercy today. They keep procrastinating until it is too late.

When considering what is expected from the Lord's disciples we felt that there could be only one response—COMMITMENT. This means we have to be prepared, as Paul was, to finish well: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith' (2 Tim. 4:7).

Is there no way back for a disciple who has lost his saltiness? We felt that there is always room for repentance: so yes, there is a way back [Comment 7]. Peter is a good example, as we see from Luke 22:32, '... but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.'
Laurence Foster

From Greenock: *'You are the salt of the earth'* (Mat. 5:13 NKJV) Salt was valuable enough to be used to pay soldiers, from which we get the word 'salary'. This is salt which has been won from the ground in places where the water is brackish and where collecting pure salt is almost impossible. A major supply of salt for Israel was from salt marshes in Cyprus; the product collected had a mixture of salt crystals together with fine silt and/or decayed vegetable matter. The shores of the Dead Sea have impure deposits of salt left when the winter floods dry out. If the salt content was high enough this would prevent further decomposition of the contaminants. Used in cooking, the earthy contamination would sink to the bottom of the pot and not be dished up with the food. However, if exposed to humid storage conditions, this impure salt would show efflorescence, losing pure salt at the surface of the block or

bag and reducing the level of salt remaining in the mass. This reaches a point where the salt content is too low for culinary use, yet the residual salt is still enough to damage plants if thrown on the soil. Throwing it onto the highways is the easiest method of disposal. Without a supply of pure salt there is no method of increasing the salt content. Neither the Dead Sea shore nor the marshes of Cyprus yield high purity salt. Their products are more akin to rock-salt used to grit icy roads in winter. [Cp. Mt Forest, last para.—Eds.]

The disciple is compared to a product which, although impure, still has value and usefulness. But if we turn our back on serving our Lord we are worthless to Him. Our value is in witnessing to the grace of God. We of ourselves cannot ‘preserve’ this world or be considered as a flavour enhancer. To maintain our value to the Lord Jesus, we need clearly to show Him to this world and tell of His wondrous works.

Fellow saint, please do not go on a low salt diet with your faith: ‘... taste and see that the Lord is good’ (Ps. 34:8).

Steve Henderson

From Halifax: *At a Pharisee’s house* Jesus was invited (Luke 14:12) by one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on a Sabbath day (v.1). When He entered the house, everyone watched Him carefully, for, behold, there was a man there who had dropsy (Gk. *hudropikos*) which is an accumulation of water in the body. They were eager to see what Jesus would do [Cp. Comment 9]. All, however, ‘held their peace’ (v.4 KJV) when Jesus asked, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?’ Then, as Matthew Henry has observed, ‘before he called he answered him’ (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*); without request, Jesus took the man and cured him (v.4). Of course, all of them would rescue their ass or ox from a ‘pit’ (‘well’ RV) on the Sabbath, so none of them could argue against the healing of a man.

Noticing how the guests chose out the ‘chief seats’ (RV), Jesus inculcates humility by a parable (vv.7-11). ‘For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted’ (v.11). ‘Humility’, writes Adam Clarke, ‘takes as much care to avoid the ostentation of an affected refusal, as the open seeking of a superior place’ (*Commentary on the Bible*). Jesus went on to speak of the great supper or feast (v.16) and of those who were invited—a parable so full, so pregnant of the gospel message! When all things were ready, the servant was sent to call the guests; but sadly, ‘they all with one consent began to make excuse’ (v.18). The lord of the house then sent his servant into the streets, lanes, highways and hedges, to compel

people to come in, that the house might be filled (v.23). So, not one of those contempters would be allowed to taste of the feast.

Robert J. Butler

From Mount Forest: On the basis of Acts 1:1 and Phil. 2:6-7 the Lord had presumably already taken the lowest place before He taught. So His teaching (vv.7-11) was reinforced by His example, something we should emulate. We would be wrong to take the lowest place intentionally, hoping to enjoy subsequent exaltation by our host: that is selfish pride in being humble! Jesus had accepted the invitation, knowing that plotting Pharisees were intent on belittling Him. Is this, too, an example for us: do we avoid potentially difficult situations instead of preparing for them?

It seems unlikely the host would have invited the man with the abnormal swelling (dropsy). Was he brought in just to test the Lord? Luke uses the same word here as in Luke 6:7, indicating the Pharisees were watching (Gk *parateroumenoi*) Him scrupulously; so it seems likely the test of healing on the Sabbath was planned rather than accidental. Again, the reference to just 'a man' with dropsy, rather than saying 'one of them', suggests he was not a sick Pharisee among the invitees. And the fact the anonymous man was 'sent away' (v.4) confirms that the host had not intended him to enjoy the festivities. This then links into the Lord's teaching about whom to invite, for the man who had just left was surely among those who should have been receiving help from those more blest. (On the principle, see 2 Cor. 8:13-15.) Note the wise progression in the Lord's teaching, from dealing with man's visible accounting now for doing what is right (v.10), then to divine accounting, revealed at resurrection (v.14); and from first teaching all present (v.7) to then addressing the host specifically (v.12). So often we find ourselves listening to His word and thinking how applicable it is for others, only for its searching power to increasingly alert us to our personal deficiencies or needs [cp. Comment 9].

Verses 16-24 seem to lend force to, rather than correct, the guest's statement in verse 15. He was right, but the only one who had actual insight into the future revealed that many would miss the opportunity for blessing because of having wrong priorities. It is instructive to turn this focus on ourselves, and ask what the inappropriate 'priorities' are in our lives, causing us to miss fellowship even now with the one who waits for our company! Poor attendance at church meetings perhaps simply evidences poor daily fellowship with Him.

It is clear from verse 34 that the Lord's use of salt as a metaphor refers to its distinctiveness, rather than preserving power: a contrast equivalent to wise and

foolish. Matthew 5:13 shows that the salt describes the whole person. So the primary lesson is that we must be recognizable as disciples to be useful (cp. Dan. 6:5; John 19:38 and 'useful' in Heb. 6:7 in that context). It is not a matter of losing eternal salvation (a contradiction in terms); it is about usefulness to the Lord. Can we of ourselves restore necessary distinctiveness? Note the Spirit's use of the passive voice 'be seasoned' (RV), not 'you season it' or even 'season itself'. Repentance is initially a divine prerogative (2 Tim. 2:25-26).

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: Earlier, Jesus had been invited to a Pharisee's home for discussion (Luke 7:36). This time it was specifically to trap Him into saying or doing something for which He could be accused. In the days of our Lord the ritual and traditions associated with the law of Moses took precedence over all other considerations. In this incident, in which our Lord healed a man on the Sabbath, He declared by His actions that the law of love takes precedence over all other customs, traditions or accepted interpretations of the law of God [Comment 8]. The Pharisees believed that the Sabbath should be observed negatively in terms of doing no labour, and positively in terms of resting and feasting. The Sabbath was made for man and was intended to be a continual reminder that God was his Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. By healing the sick man on the Sabbath the Lord was giving a lesson to the scribes and Pharisees that the expression of genuine good will must never be restricted by time or place.

Jesus taught another lesson to the guests, telling them not to seek places of honour: service is more important in God's kingdom than status (v.7). Our Lord's all-seeing eye scrutinizes those who take the highest places around the table. The world is like that: it respects those who gain the greatest honours or take the best pickings. Christians, however, will always be happiest in the lowest place, because it is there that we meet the Lord Jesus! We do not need to wonder what place the Lord occupied as He made these observations, for the Pharisee does not seem to have intended to make Him go up higher. If the Lord Jesus had a lesson to teach the fellow guests there, there was also one for the master of the house. Jesus taught the guests about the place they should choose.

When we eat together it should be a time of loving fellowship and joyful gratitude to God; but the Pharisees tried to turn the tables into a trap to exploit the people. They went to feasts only to receive honours and they invited to their feasts only people who would return the favour. They were, however, prepared to use a man

who had dropsy in order to try to catch Jesus. Hospitality is ministry, but only if our motive is to help others and glorify God.

In the third lesson Jesus told the host not to be exclusive as to whom he invites. God opens His kingdom to everyone, especially to those who can never repay His invitation. A man is not in the true sense hospitable who entertains only those who can entertain in return. Such interested hospitality is not wrong, but there is no merit in it, and it does not lay up treasures in heaven. Luke 14:12-14 shows a lesson for hosts: hosting can be a way of putting others in our debt.

B.V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: *Excuse makers and the substitutes* Instances of people making excuses in the Bible include Adam in Genesis 3, Moses in Exodus 2, Gideon in Judges 6, Elisha in 1 Kings 19, Naaman in 2 Kings 5, Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1 and Felix in Acts 24. The parable in Luke 14:16-24 illustrates the lack of appreciation of God and neglect or hatred of Him. All sinners are united on this one point, making excuses regarding why they do not renounce sin and serve God.

None of the excuses should in any way have been a reasonable hindrance to attending a banquet. The host became angry, having a right to be so for he had been deliberately insulted by each one of these invitees. The call was urgent for the supper was already prepared and would be wasted if guests were not found. This applies to Israel, who were first offered the gospel and rejected it as a nation (John 1:11-12; Rom. 1:16). Now the invitation is extended to everyone in the world (Mat. 28:18-20).

The parable of the great banquet is a picture of God's offer of salvation to human beings. To those who accept His free gift there begins an intimate relationship with God. This emphasizes that God's invitation is not accepted by those who consider themselves to be fine as they are. Instead, those with no status or influence in the world's eyes are the ones who accept the invitation.

The host regarded these people as unworthy and said that none of those who were bidden should taste of his supper. Here the host is God Himself, who prepared everything for redemption of sin. The prepared banquet is Jesus Christ [is it not rather the joyful provision laid out by God to those who have accepted the invitation in the Lord Jesus (e.g. Rev. 19:9)?—*Eds.*]. There is a sad conclusion for all excuse-makers: God will not accept man's flimsy, feeble, sorry, excuses. All unbelievers are without excuse before God (Rom. 1:20). No excuse will be accepted in the day of judgement

(Luke 13:24-27). God will convict all ungodly excuse-makers in that great day (Jude 14-15). So let us denounce all worthless excuses and make ourselves right with almighty God.

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *Three lessons from the Lord* The great Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the days of His flesh, was an incomparable teacher. Isaiah captured it beautifully: 'The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning, he awakens my ear to hear as the learned' (Is. 50:4-6 NKJV). When the officers sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Jesus returned empty-handed and declared 'No man ever spoke like this Man' (John 7:46), it was not because the Lord spoke only words of comfort and hope; He had also cutting and rousing words that tore through the façade of hypocrisy laying open only the bare necessities of life: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the other matters undone' (Mat. 23:23).

It was invariably to these weightier matters that the Lord had His first lesson for the Pharisees. The Pharisees in their twisted thoughts presumed to entrap Him by His act of kindness towards one of His creatures, in clear violation of their definition of the Sabbath. Like the wise man, Solomon, noted: 'Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird' (Prov. 1:17). How much more is it to ensnare Him before whom: '... there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account' (Heb. 4:13)! The Pharisees chose not to answer the query of the Lord whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. It was not only the act of healing but the larger symbolism of doing good that no doubt irked the Pharisees.

Nevertheless, the Lord would have them learn the ways of the Master and of God who is love and Father of all mercies, and 'the God of all comfort' (2 Cor. 1:3). The disciple must learn the teaching of the Master if he is to do His will (John 7:17), and it is a key part of God's character to do good always, Sabbath or not: 'How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him' (Acts 10:38). The Lord indeed made the Law and teaching glorious in His time (Is. 42:21) and a vital component of this is that God delights in showing mercy to the helpless

and hopeless, always: 'He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Mic. 6:8).

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): Following the steps of the Lord takes us to Peter as he wrote of the Lord who, in His suffering, has left us an example (1 Pet. 2:21). Although most English translations go on to say that we 'might follow in his steps' (e.g. ESV), the Greek contains no word for 'in'. So, the RV translation is more accurate: 'that ye should follow his steps'. To follow in His steps would, of course, mean going to Calvary, which would always have been impossible and now, through the finality of His work, is also unnecessary. To follow His steps, however, indicates the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10) rather than an expectation that we could or should endure the same.

2. (Aberdeen): The purpose of salt is to season (Col. 4:6). It adds nothing to a dish save its distinctive flavour, so if that is lost, then the salt has no purpose at all. So it is with the disciple. Surely those who live up to the teaching of Luke 14:33 will be distinctive in the world! And yet, if their distinctiveness begins to wane, their purpose in the world wanes with it, until eventually that purpose is lost entirely. I take it that the throwing away is akin to the discarding of the fruitless branches in John 15:6. It is the work of judgment on a life of service which demonstrates no difference from the world—no distinctiveness in flavour, no fruit on the branch. I would understand that action as being irreversible.

J.T.N.

3. (Aberkenfig): Women were expected and welcomed at feasts according to the Law, widows being specially mentioned in care for the poor at the three required feasts before the Lord (Deut. 16:11). Compare also the presence of Mary at Cana's wedding, where servants obeyed her instructions.

M.A.

4. (Belfast and Cromer): A separate interpretation has God as the Builder and the king relying totally on us as disciples. Like the great literature (and of course much more) that they are, the parables are multi-layered and this interpretation can be held alongside the sound and healthful teaching brought out by friends and in *Introducing*.

5. (Buckhaven): Not an across-the-board obligation for 'the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children' (2 Cor. 12:14).

P.D.

6. (Derby): The Greek preposition *para* metaphorically can also mean drawing alongside for a particular reason, in this case the motivation being that of sinister intent to entrap the Saviour into saying or doing something which they would then endeavour to use against Him.

R.B.F.

7. (Derby): See Comment 2 above. Repentance is brought about by the work of God (2 Tim. 2:25) and in some circumstances may be withheld (Heb. 6:4-6; 12:15-17). The nature of those circumstances must be left to the gracious knowledge of God Himself, but certainly the teaching of the New Testament indicates that, through loss of service, a believer may be cut off from fellowship with the Lord and so denied repentance leading to restoration.

8. (Podagatlapalli): Love was at the very heart of the Law (Mat. 22:36-40) and by its administration both the holiness and the love of God were shown. Sometimes, it is said, particularly in questions of moral accountability in matters of service, that love should prevail over a rigorous interpretation of the Word. But what does 'love' mean in this context, since the Word has come from the one who is Love and the primary focus of our love in applying it must be towards God who gave it? Unquestionably, the Lord was gracious towards those bruised reeds who came to Him; yet He never once gave cause to anyone to relax the righteous requirements of the Law on account of their weakness (John 5:14; 8:11). So we too must be careful, as we seek to show the grace of God to those in need, to administer His word gently and faithfully. If we do so, we'll not find the word of such a gracious God lacking in compassion to those for whom He gave His own Son.

J.T.N.

9. (General): (1) *The writer's art* Some have noted Luke's use of a word for hostile watching, and this is emphasised by the clause, literally, 'And, look you, a certain man with dropsy was in front of him' (the pronoun emphasised)—in effect, '*right* in front of' the man who'd surely be prompted to healing. This is aptly followed by 'Jesus in answer said ...'—i.e. replying to the intent looks from silent men. Here then is the unmistakeable atmosphere of a prepared confrontation or trap, illustrating how shrivelled was the Pharisees' level of thought and heart; we hardly need speculate that the host had arranged for a less than welcome guest to be present. The miracle is sketched in a few swift, definite strokes, the point for Luke and for us being the dialogue of challenge and instruction. The Master of medical need was so alive to the whole spiritual and social situation, like a doctor of the first class.

(2) *Jesus the Teacher* We recall those opening words 'I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach' from Acts 1:1 (NIV): the deeds were for our learning. There is a choice progression (as Mount Forest paper notes) from healing a broken man, to

guidance in social love, to the parable about the offer of salvation and the kingdom to come, into the high demands of true discipleship. We focus on the intended audience for the parable. Though showing us plenty of the first call to belief and salvation, the introduction in verse 15 concerns those *'in the kingdom'*, and the parable's message is primarily for the disciple, leading to the heart's answer to being taken from poverty to spiritual riches: full preparation for the high devotion the Master expects, and that He said is the *only* true answer we can give. Each time we read it, do I not feel dismay at our common selling of the disciple path as a package of benefits—whereas our Lord makes clear that only surrendering life to Him, and taking up my cross, wins the title of follower in His steps.

M.A.

From the Mail-box

COMPELLED AND CONSTRAINED (Gk. *anangkazo*)

(noting W.E. Vine's helpful entry on 'Compel', in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

The ant does not have anyone to compel him (Prov. 6:6-8 Sept). Thankfully (and perhaps unthankfully) we do. Vine informs us that it comes 'by threat, entreaty, force or persuasion'.

Jesus constrained His disciples (as of necessity) to get in the boat, to go ahead of Him to the other side in order to enter into an experience for the proof of faith (Mat. 14:22; Mark. 6:45). This is similar to the 'if need be' of 1 Peter 1:6.

Invited guests who, in effect, refused their double invitation (Luke. 14:16-17) first found themselves outside the great supper, their places taken by lowly people of the city together with those in the obvious outside place who had been compelled—not by force—but by entreaty and persuasion as an accompaniment to the word of invitation (v.23). Maybe Israel and Gentiles are in view, but the subsequent urgency of the invitation followed by added persuasion brought blessedness to those sitting at the table (v.15).

Saul's opposition to the saints compelled them to blaspheme. We should not compel believers to do something that has no scriptural authority in churches of God (Gal. 2:3,14; 6:12); neither should we demean those who have the rule over us to the point that they feel it necessary to grovel (2 Cor. 12:11).

Paul was constrained by the word of God to do that which is right, as God had commanded him to do, so he appealed to the highest court of government (Acts 28:19). We may be so constrained when authorities, contrary to the word of God, impose unjust practices on us.

D. Parker (Hayes)

THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL

In the three soul-absorbing narratives of our study chapter this month, there is the most wonderful illustration of different aspects of the work of our Saviour in His mission of salvation to the lost and weary of this world.

First of all, however, the testimony of the religious exclusivists—the Pharisees, and the political theorists—the scribes, declares the Lord to be one who mixes freely with the despised of society and is willing to spend any amount of time with them, all the while revealing the love and mercy of God to them and everyone else (v.2).

The Sheep Farmer This man ‘dropped everything’ to go out to a dangerous place and spend whatever time was necessary in his endeavour to recover one lost animal. We don’t know how long the search took before the creature was located, but to the owner it was well worth the effort. This portrays our Saviour’s determination, at whatever cost, to bring back even one lost sinner to the fold (see Luke 19:10).

The Householder 10% of one’s money disappearing into thin air leaves quite a dent in monetary resources required to meet everyday needs. Ensuring that the necessary equipment was available to make the search viable and combing every corner to discover the whereabouts of the lost item, no stone

was left unturned by this lady. The work of our Saviour, culminating in His ultimate sacrifice on the cross, was utterly demanding and the cost factor was immense (see 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

The Father Who would deny the vital part played by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in the rescue from eternal loss of a wilful and ungrateful sinful soul? Here, in this story, we are assured of a loving and praying father who ‘never gave up’, though his erring offspring had gone so far from his care and protection. How often the Lord Jesus made reference to the Father working in conjunction with Him, the Son, in all the preparatory work that led up to Calvary (see John 5:17; 6:44; 10:29 etc.).

How can we even begin to evaluate such a great salvation (Heb. 2:3)? One helpful step is to see the effect it has on angelic beings in God’s presence—pure joy in the fact of one sinner repenting of their sad and lost condition of soul, and now, having exercised believing faith in the Saviour, escaping the wrath which is to come. How can anyone doubt the biblical truth of eternal judgement and condemnation when such an event produces such a response in heaven (John 3:36; 1 Thes. 4:10; 2 Thes. 1:8-9; Heb. 6:2)?

R.B.F.

From Study Groups

THE PARABLE OF GOD'S LOVE (Luke 15)

From Aberdeen: *The place of rejoicing* The three parables in Luke chapter 15 teach us the appropriateness of rejoicing whenever a lost sinner repents and turns to God [Comment 1]. The sheep, the silver coin and the prodigal son were all lost and found. Immediately preceding these parables it is significant that Luke points out how the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling that this man, Jesus, was receiving sinners and eating with them (Luke 15:2). So the Lord showed by means of those parables how completely misguided was their disapproval of repentant sinners who were being joyfully accepted by God. The heart of God is revealed in such rejoicing. The mission of the Son of Man was to seek and save those who were lost.

Attitudes The prodigal son returned with a changed attitude, having realised his unworthiness and confessing his sinfulness—'make me as one of thy hired servants' (v.19 RV). The response of the father reveals the heart of our heavenly Father when the prodigal's father, full of compassion, would have none of it, but rather called for 'the best robe ... and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ... and let us eat, and make merry' (vv.22-23).

Why was the older son's attitude included in this parable? It was surely to bring home to the Pharisees and scribes how mistaken they were in their attitude towards their fellows. The Pharisees were the ones who needed to change their attitude towards God and towards God's dealings with sinners [Comment 2].

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: The tax collectors were: 'as a class, detested not only by the Jews, but by other nations also, both on account of their employment and of the harshness, greed, and deception with which they did their job'; while sinners were: 'specifically of men (or women) stained with certain definite vices or crimes' (*Strong's Concordance*). Thus we see that these people were those whom the self-righteous saw as the dregs of society, or those who collaborated with the oppressors of the nation. It could be seen that these could be classified with addicted, enslaved, dispossessed and homeless refugees of our modern age—avoided by those who consider themselves to be decent and upright citizens.

While the rulers and religious leaders condemned them, the Lord Jesus saw them as lost sheep, lost coins and lost sons, who needed to be sought, found and brought back to the safety of God's presence. He placed a value upon them that others did

not see. Sheep were valuable to their owners; money was scarce especially for the poor; and sons were particularly valuable, being the lifeblood and future hope of the family. Jesus indicated that the tax collectors and sinners were as much to be cherished and looked after as any of the examples He brought to their attention.

As we appreciate the standing of such people in the heart of God, we begin to appreciate how much He loved the world, for whom He sent the Son to be the Saviour, through His death on the cross. For the text 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23 ESV) describes perfectly the standing, not only of tax collectors and sinners, but also the self-righteous and religious of our world too, who without God as their Saviour, are subject to coming judgement. The sheep could be considered to be typical of the wanderer, the careless or the ignorant amongst men; the coin perhaps typical of the rich and powerful who shun any hint of being indebted to God and who rely solely on their own abundance to get through life [Comment 3]. But the son seems to highlight how the pleasures of life, the lust of the flesh and the deep desire to have one's own way, take us away from our heavenly Father's presence to become lost in worldliness and dissipation. Sadly, we recognise that these descriptions apply equally to the unregenerate of this world and to those who have 'tasted the heavenly gift' (Heb. 6:4) and who have gone back to the ways of this world, to their own loss and hurt.

But what grace we see in that, not only does the Son come to where the lost are in order to save, and the Spirit seeks to enlighten the darkness of the unsaved condition, but also that the Father is longing to receive to Himself all who return in repentance and faith! He heals and enriches once more those who have squandered what they were given in the first place.

Edwin Stanley

From Belfast: *The parable of God's love* This threefold parable accentuates the contrast of the love of God with the exclusiveness of the Pharisees. The parables were spoken to the Pharisees and the scribes, but the numbers of tax collectors and sinners who drew near to hear Him confirm the great drawing power of the spoken word of God. The religious leaders of the day appear to have divided humanity into two classes, namely the unclean and the righteous. They then set about living life where possible in separation from the unclean. Some rabbis took this to the extreme, refusing to teach God's word to the unclean. The term 'sinners' was commonly used of tax collectors, adulterers, robbers and the like and was apparently also used for those who refused to follow the Mosaic law as interpreted by the scribes. What a contrast indeed to the all-encompassing love of God! The actions of the religious leaders were illustrated by the actions of the older son, who stayed with his father,

working hard whilst the prodigal son blew his share of the inheritance. Yet we see that, although the elder son was in the father's house, there is a feeling that he is far from the father's heart. His anger at the father's acceptance of the return of his brother is replicated by the religious leaders who were angry at Jesus sitting and eating with 'sinners'. 'His story reveals the possibility of living in the father's house and failing to understand the father's heart' (G. Campbell Morgan). But what of ourselves in our walk of life and our relationship with those around us who are lost? Do we at times come across as 'pious' or distant?

The forgiving love of the father symbolises the divine mercy of God, and it is demonstrated in the actions of the father of the long-lost son. The father's love waited and he never forgot. It was a love that fully received, with no preconditions attached, even though the son had disgraced the family name. And what of the intensity of the father's love? He ran and fell on his neck! Unusual in that culture for a father to show such emotion and run in this way. It is noted by a commentator that in the original language he 'kissed him repeatedly'.

'The truth here taught is just this: that ... grace receives men as sinners; that it deals with unworthiness and worthlessness; that those who think themselves righteous are not the objects of divine compassion, but the unrighteous ... in a word, that salvation is not of merit but of grace' (C.H. Spurgeon).

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *A lesson for the elder son?* The accusation that the Pharisees and scribes levelled at the Lord Jesus is the very thing that causes us to rejoice! 'This man receives sinners and eats with them' (v.2 ESV).

The wonder is that this infinitely holy Being was willing to leave aside the glory that was His 'before the world existed' (John 17:5) and come to earth to live among us as the incarnate Word (John 1). A perfect man among people whose behaviour, language and thinking were at enmity with God because of their fallen nature. The fact that this Holy One chose to 'receive sinners and eat with them' speaks volumes about the love of God. Sadly, the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes needed to learn what God's love was like because they had the warped idea that God would only love those who kept His commandments. This is why three times over the Lord emphasised the value to God of a sinner who repents, in contrast to those who trust in their own righteousness.

The elder son's outburst of self-righteous anger, against what he wrongly perceived to be the father's unfair treatment of him, is truly revealing. He thought that in

celebrating the return of this waster of his father's substance, his father had failed to acknowledge the faithful service that he, the elder son, had rendered. His reaction perfectly illustrates the thinking of the Pharisees who trusted in their own law-keeping abilities rather than casting themselves upon the mercy of God as sinners. They thought God was indebted to them for their righteousness instead of the other way around [see also Comment 2].

When the father said to the elder son, 'all that is mine is yours' (v.31), he meant that the remainder of his riches would automatically fall to the elder son, since the younger son had squandered his share of the inheritance, albeit in his father's goodness he was restored to a position of equal privilege as a son of his father. There was no need, therefore, for the elder son to be angry [Comment 4]. On the contrary, his father put his finger on a serious flaw in his eldest son's thinking, namely his failure to acknowledge that the repentant son was his own brother, and he ought to have rejoiced that his brother had returned in heart to his father. The question remains as to whether the elder son's heart was ever really at one with his father's.

The Lord's lesson in this telling narrative is that where there is true repentance forgiveness is essential. Forgiveness aligns us with the loving heart of God the Father who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23), but rather deeply desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: *The heart of God revealed* This discourse is three parables in one, showing God's unconditional love for the lost and His great desire for their restoration. The lost sheep had strayed from the safety and care of the shepherd, who went out looking for it until he found it. The woman kept searching until she had found the coin; and the father was always looking for his son to return, until at last he did. In each case, when the lost were found, there was great rejoicing on earth and in heaven. We are reminded even today of the joy that overflows when sinners are restored, and that there is no place for others who might show a judgemental and unforgiving attitude towards those who truly repent and return to the fold.

Tax collectors and sinners Tax collectors worked for Rome, the occupying power. They were paid wages by taking a percentage of the tax they collected, and some took more than their fair share. For these two reasons, they were despised by the people and put into the same social class as the openly wicked, which included prostitutes, who were regarded as the lowest of the low. Some of these people turned away from sin to follow Jesus: the woman who anointed the Lord's feet (Luke 7:37-39), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8-10) and Matthew (Mat. 9:9) who, along with many others,

repented and received forgiveness from the Master. The Pharisees looked down on all such, and brought forth the condemnation of the Lord for their self-righteous attitude. He said to them, 'The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you' (Mat. 21:31 NIV); and, 'I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Luke 5:32).

How thankful we should be that we have a merciful and gracious God, who, though He hates sin, has ever loved the sinner! But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy (Tit. 3:4-5).

John Parker

From Derby: Tax collectors who gathered taxes on behalf of Rome and anyone else who had seriously transgressed the Law, were regarded by scribes and Pharisees as sinners through and through. Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:39) was surprised that Jesus was allowing a woman who was a sinner to touch Him. In Mark 14:4 we see the disdain from others who were self-righteous in that situation, which we also see in Matthew 26:8. There were people who were outcasts who did not observe the commands of the Law. Yet the Pharisees and scribes had the same need but did not realise it. As a result of the Pharisees' attitude to the Lord, He had to bring out His teaching in parables.

What we see from the lost sheep and coin is that God is searching us out, though we may not be searching for Him. There is the human inclination to find something that has been lost, even as the owner of a set of precious items. Also we see the inability of objects to find their own way back into a collection. In the case of the sheep it may not have realised that it was lost while it was grazing on what food it could find. The Lord emphasised the joy in heaven over one sinner who repented more than over ninety nine who were righteous [i.e. self-righteous—*Eds.*] The Pharisees considered themselves as righteous, for they believed in God, and could not possibly repent of sin being unaware of practising it. Humankind rejoices in finding one item to complete a set. Heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents, more than over the self-righteous who think they are serving God.

The ninety-nine sheep were part of the fold and were in the shepherd's care, whereas one was outside of that care and needed to be rescued from danger [Comment 5]. Here the Lord was speaking to the unrepentant, whether they were Pharisees, scribes or sinners. All were in need of the Saviour. The Lord always reached out to all people.

In the case of Pharisees, Saul was converted. In Romans 3:23 we see that all men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It is the word of God that speaks to people. There are many who live for the moment and want to be free from the shackles of restraint, but end up in a far-off place, away from the shelter of the fold. While in that distant place they probably realise they are not happy, and want to come back in repentance. However, there has to be a turning point where people have to be totally reliant on God's mercy. When the prodigal returned to his father's house there was joy; yet we see how indignant the elder son was, who had a self-righteous attitude. Here was resentment amid the joy of the household.

The Pharisees were like the elder son: even though they had not wandered beyond the land, they too were in need of the Saviour. The Lord reached out to all whether they were blind, deaf or lame, and He healed them. Can we be resentful of people who have been brought back into the fold? We need to have the joy for one who was lost and is now found. God's love is the same to people at all stages of life. In Luke 15:22 we read what happens to sinners who repent: they are clothed with garments of righteousness. In one way the prodigal was always the son of the father, no matter where he was, and realised he needed to return. The way we are raised has an effect on our character, but we are all in need of the Saviour, to turn to Him, as we are powerless to save ourselves.

Robert Foster

From Greenock: *A father's love and sibling rivalry* Two brothers grew up in a godly home, the sons of one father. All was well for a time as they studied the Torah and were obedient to the father. There came a time when the younger son grew restless and he tired of his provincial home and all the strictures that the Torah imposed. He also resented his elder brother's right of primogeniture, to have a much larger part of his father's inheritance. He should have counted himself fortunate. If he had been a daughter instead of a son he would have had no rights at all of inheritance. It seemed to him that life was passing him by, and while he remained at home he had not much of a future. He longed to go out into the world and make his fortune, unwilling to wait around for his father to die so that he might inherit what would be rightfully his. He demanded, rather than asked for, his inheritance. With high hopes and no plans as to how he would use this he left home.

He lighted on a town and began looking for friends; they were attracted to him like moths to a flame, not being interested in him, however, or in giving him any good financial advice. His new-found companions proved they were no friends at all when his money ran out. True are the words of the wise: 'A fool and his money are soon parted.'

When his money vanished so did his friends. Now he was destitute, soon became hungry, and was forced by sheer necessity to take a job with a pig farmer. What was a 'good' Jewish boy doing feeding swine? His circumstances brought him to his senses. Tearfully he thought of his home and of his father, and remembered how good his life had been before he left home. Compared to his present state his father's servants lived like princes. He knew that he must repent of his actions and take the lowly place of a suppliant, begging his father's forgiveness. 'The way of transgressors is hard' (Prov. 13:15 AV). As he neared home he perhaps was careful to avoid the gate of the town where the religious leaders held court. They would have brought the full weight of the moral law upon him for his transgressions [Comment 6].

Not long after his younger son had left, we deduce the father would daily go to where he would have a view to the horizon. He had been deeply hurt by his son's mercenary attitude and heartless ingratitude, yet yearned for his wayward, lost son. He was often disappointed: and did his longing for his wastrel son cause friction in his home? 'Give up, Father', his eldest son might have scolded him. 'Your darling boy is not coming home'. Perhaps the father was too old to go searching for his son like a shepherd seeking a lost sheep. All he could do was wait and hope. What unfailing love! What amazing grace the father showered upon his ungrateful son!

Surely this is a beautiful pictorial type of the grace and love of God. The parable of the prodigal son strikes a universal chord in the hearts of men and women because there have been times in everyone's life when God's blessings have been taken as a matter of course, as though they were theirs by right, and they have turned away from the Father. Oh, the wonder of the infinite grace and love of God for such guilty, ungrateful, hell-deserving sinners!

John Peddie

From Halifax: *Found, found, found* As the tax collectors and sinners drew near to Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes murmured, or 'grumbled' (15:1 ESV), their cavilling being driven by their disgust at His receiving of sinners and His eating with them (v.2). Of Jesus' three 'lost and found' parables, the first is presented by Matthew (18:12-14) in another context and in a less graphic form [Comment 7].

The sheep-farmer's rejoicing is likened to the joy in heaven over the repentance of one sinner (v.7). Commenting upon this verse T. Scott writes, 'Every Christian, in his turn, has occasioned this joy in heaven; but it is the cause of renewed joy, when another and another is brought to repentance' (*Commentaries of Scott and Henry*, National Bible Supply, 1858, p.1002).

Of the woman's diligent seeking for her lost drachma coin, Jesus tells how she called her dear friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me for I have found the piece which I had lost' (v.9 RV). In the same way, there is joy among the angels at the recovery of a single sinner (v.10). Proverbs 2:4 is taken by the Jews (*Shirhashirim Rabba*, vol. 1.4) as a parable on wisdom somewhat like this: 'If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures.'

Not long after he had received the portion of goods from his father the younger son journeyed to a far country, wasting his possessions with riotous or 'prodigal' living (Luke 15:13 NKJV). Yet the father's compassion transcended all: for his son, who was dead, was alive again; 'he was lost, and is found' (v.24).

Robert J. Butler

From Mount Forest: Fellowship It is possible that some of the Lord's hearers had been present when He taught in the Pharisee's house. He had there corrected the host and invitees, illustrating their faults in relation to eating together. Now they accuse Him about His choice of fellowship when eating (15:1-2). So it is interesting that each of the three illustrations He now provides concludes in fellowship, with an implication of restored people rejoicing together over a meal. So we can see a continuity from the teaching He gave in response to the Pharisee's friends' statement in Luke 14:15.

Whether one parable in three parts, or three separate parables, there is one common objective: that the initial hearers (and we) should appreciate the triune God's desire for a sinner's repentance. Here is comparability to John chapter 10 regarding the shepherd: a depiction of God the Son as an agent of repentance. In the case of the squanderer, God the Father's role is prominent. In the seeking woman we may see God the Holy Spirit, who convicts the world in respect to sin, and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8); the world is full of coin-hardened sinners, hiding as it were from God in the darkness and dirt of unsaved lives [cp. Comment 3]. For us such spiritualization is almost implicit, but the initial hearers would likely focus on the simple illustrations of divine assessment of individual value meriting a rejoicing on recovery. Perhaps the angels of Matthew 18:10 would be first to rejoice!

Will not God use us to seek the lost, even if we must go where we would not normally be found? We cannot rely wholly on gospel witness calling people to come (for our convenience) to where we are. Nor should we lose heart when we cannot follow the unrepentant in their stubborn desire to depart, for in the last case the father, who must stay at home, grants his wayward son repentance, and welcomes

him back. 2 Timothy 2:25 reminds us of God's required initiative in granting repentance, perhaps seen in the parable in the son coming to his senses.

When the father says to the older son 'all that is mine is yours' (v.31) it indicates that the younger son had lost his inheritance: he could no longer expect a share [see Comment 4]. This is salutary if considered alongside Ephesians 5:5 and Luke 14:15. Being 'in' the kingdom may not be equivalent to having 'inheritance' in it [Comment 8]. The older son's disdain (v.30)—'this son (Gk *huios*) of yours'—is met with the father's response: 'son' (or 'child' Gk. *teknon*) and '... this brother of yours'. 'Son' may imply (v.21) sharing in the character of the father (see Mat. 5:45; John 5:19). *Teknon* may be used similarly to *huios* (John 8:39), though *teknon* here perhaps implies endearment and a degree of immaturity. Evidently the change of word is not accidental: the childish, self-righteous, older brother was intending to liken the father to the wayward son, but the father neatly turns the tables, declaring the squanderer to be his brother (Gk. *adelphos*: from the same womb). The father saw inherent likenesses which the older son did not want to recognize!

Geoff Hydon

From Ravulapalem: *The attitude of the elder son* The elder son went out of the father's house with anger while the younger one re-entered with repentance and confession. There will be more joy about a repenting sinner in heaven and joy in the presence of the angels. Similarly there will be sadness about a person like the elder son, for he was unappreciative of his father's love. When Jesus was bringing sinners to God (v.2) the religious leaders of Israel criticised Him. The elder son is a symbol of these leaders. All three examples (vv. 4,8,11) Jesus used are akin to this type of people [Comment 3]. Sadly, there are still people of this sort in the world today.

We can notice the attitude of the elder son, from verses 28 to 30.

- 1). He became angry.
- 2). He refused to go into the father's house.
- 3). He made his father come out of the house to plead with him.
- 4). He questioned the father regarding his work over all the years.
- 5). He referred to the father's non-recognition of his services.
- 6). He blamed father for not giving him money or a lamb for feasting with friends.
- 7). He remembers the prodigality and sin of the brother while the father forgets and forgives.

In God's sight this attitude is worse than the sins of the younger son. Anger about forgiveness; selfishness and jealousy about the blessing of his brother; harbouring

envy of his own kin—not even calling the younger son ‘brother’ but ‘your son’ (to the father) while the father is telling him ‘your brother’. These are all part of his woeful attitude.

Israel is a special nation, selected by God (Deut. 7:6). The elder son is a symbol of the then Jewish leaders. See what was written about believers—‘So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours ... and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s’ (1 Cor. 3:21,23 ESV).

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *Identifying tax collectors and sinners* In every civilization there have been classes of people whom societies have looked upon with disaffection, usually because of their occupations. The tax collectors in Jesus’ time were particularly disliked because of their perceived dishonesty. It is reported by some that there were two systems of tax collection in New Testament times, both attracting equal degree of scorn.

The first: the system of tax farming where the government contracted with tax farmers who paid to the government an advance of the tax to be collected and then collected the same from the people at a premium.

The second: the system introduced by the Romans, who hired tax agents that collected the taxes directly from the people and distinctly increased the tax to make a profit for themselves.

Although the systems varied in Israel, yet the consensus of the people (particularly the religious leaders) was that the occupation was a despicable one and the tax collectors were in a special class of evil-doers, hence the expression ‘tax collectors and sinners’ (Luke 15:1; Mat. 9:10-11; 11:19; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:30 and 7:34).

The religious leaders of Jesus’ time could not comprehend how this supposedly pious Man could associate with tax collectors, whose notoriety was commonplace. They presumed that such association was a true reflection of Jesus’ character; for if He were indeed godly He ought to have sought the company of the ‘righteous’ religious leaders. The tax collectors, fully conscious of social opinion about them, were genuinely delighted to be received by the Master, who, though He spoke firmly and gravely, yet held out boundless hope for their salvation.

The sinners included a diverse class of people who were considered to be transgressors of the laws of God. In this group were the thieves, prostitutes, drunkards, murderers, idolaters and Gentiles. The attitude of the Pharisee in Jesus’

story captured the general view: 'The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector"' (Luke 18:11 NKJV). The sinners were deeply conscious in many respects, of the errors of their ways; and on hearing of the uncommon love displayed by the Lord Jesus, were irresistibly drawn to Him. Arguably, the lesson of the parable of the great banquet (14:16-24) resonated with them, and they recognized in the Lord the ultimate redemption of their souls, or at least a reformation of their lives. The Lord confirmed this expectation thus: 'Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you"' (Mat. 21:31).

By His willingness to identify with the tax collectors and sinners the Lord Jesus showed the true nature of His redemptive work. He first came in the likeness of sinful flesh: 'For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin. He condemned sin in the flesh' (Rom. 8:3). The Lord, as He dined with tax collectors and sinners, showed them the depth of God's love: as it is written, 'For there is none righteous, no not one' (Rom. 3:10).

Indeed the plaintive cry of the tax collector echoes in every penitent heart: 'And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner"' (Luke 18:13).

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): *A tapestry in three parts* Drawing on verse 3, 'he told them this parable', it is often said that Luke 15 comprises a single parable told in three parts. As Mount Forest point out (para. 2), the three main characters can readily be identified as representing the activity of each member of the Godhead in the work of salvation, which the Scripture presents so clearly as a work of the triune God, both in its inception (Heb. 9:14) and its reception (John 16:13-15). Yet the three parts also tell us more about the human condition and how God was moved by it. The sheep was *hopelessly* lost, but was the object of the shepherd's pity; the coin was *helplessly* lost, but was dearly valued by the seeking woman; and the son was *wilfully* lost, but was ever the object of the Father's love. So in these three parts we find the greater expression of the majesty of the gospel, its many threads woven into a beautiful tapestry.

J.T.N.

2. (Aberdeen): *The attitude of the elder brother of the prodigal, being jealous of the festive atmosphere generated by his father on the safe return of the black sheep of the family, is indicative of the reaction of the bulk of the nation of Israel when it was realised that Gentiles also would be recipients of God's offer of salvation, promised through the prophet Isaiah seven centuries before the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel, the Lord Jesus, came (Is. 49:6-7). This is borne out by the experience of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch of Pisidia and Paul, Silas and Timothy in Corinth (Acts 13:44-51; 18:5-6; see also 1 Thes. 2:16).*

R.B.F.

3. (Aberkenfig and others): *What aspect of man's sinful state the lost coin might represent* This is an interesting significance friends find in the silver coin. Reasoning from scratch, however, there is *being lost*: a description of departure from God who gave us being, and cares about our spiritual life or lack of it. Then there is the element of being *valued by the seeker* who represents the Saviour, while to the rich, one drachma, although silver, is not worth their trouble to make a search. To a relatively poor woman, however, it mattered seriously, as earned (by a man) in a day, and as one of only ten to draw upon when in need. We are not told the family circumstances, but know enough of a woman's place in the social and working life of her times to see her as more disadvantaged than a man—and there is no mention of husband or sons. Those, however, who depend on their material success and try to do without God could come into the picture in that the whole chapter can appeal to a wide range of society, because it shows the dedicated care of the Seeker or Father.

An important aspect of these parables is also that they are able to touch a hardened heart with the beginnings of love for others, or help recovery in those who are learning cynicism. Do the Lord's words not often radiate heavenly values beyond the focus of the main point?

4. (Buckhaven): The elder son also forgets or overlooks that his father had already 'divided his property between them' (v.12 ESV), so he was entitled to ask for anything needed for having a special meal for his friends—while such an outgoing gesture seems out of character.

M.A.

In this sense the elder brother had suffered no loss by the younger's return and reconciliation. So it is in the spiritual application, since the riches of God are inexhaustible. Those who know the Father's favour are not impoverished by the recovery of the lost; instead, they should be enriched by sharing the joy of the Father.

5. (Derby): *Open country—place of the lost* Rather than being in the fold, the ninety-nine were in the ‘open country’ (v.4 ESV). The imagery of the fold is used in John 10 as a walled area (cf. Num. 32:16) with an entrance where the shepherd would come to lead out his own sheep to pasture. It speaks of a place set apart under the Shepherd’s care and authority. The word in Luke 15 denotes a wilderness, emphasising its nature as uninhabited and lonely (e.g. Mark 1:35; Acts 1:20). That the ninety-nine were in such a place denotes that they too were lost, though being in a larger company made them unaware of it. The one which had gone astray knew it was lost, and it was to this one that the Shepherd’s heart turned.

6. (Greenock): The weight of the Law was severe indeed for such wasteful sons—see Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

J.T.N.

7. (Halifax): *The parallel story of the lost sheep in Matthew* is set in teaching about the importance to God of children and their faith, followed by counsel on forgiveness and reconciliation between saints in a church of God—all relevant to under-shepherds of the flock and to preachers of the Word, as we all should be, either in personal or public service. We infer that the Lord understandably used this touching and homely parable, as He would others, more than once for various audiences, both to instruct and to move hearts.

M.A.

8. (Mount Forest): Inheritance in the kingdom of God is enjoyed by taking a place within that kingdom. That is the force of Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 6 that ‘the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God’, since unrighteousness has no place there (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Conversely, therefore, the loss of inheritance in the kingdom must equate to a loss of place. Of course, the kingdom of God is a spiritual entity (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 15:50), so that loss of place may not necessarily be seen by loss of place in the physical assembly of the saints, by which participation in the kingdom is enjoyed on earth.

J.T.N.

IN THE SIGHT OF MEN AND IN THE SIGHT OF GOD (Luke 16:15)

What a variety of human life is brought before the reader in our portion this month! One who is rich in this world's goods is alongside Lazarus who has nothing of them. But Lazarus is then seen with Abraham, a man of both great riches and great faith. Having no knowledge in his lifetime of the entire body of Scripture comprising Moses and the prophets, Abraham now is aware of their supreme importance for the eternal destiny of five brothers. He knows about them as he does about their rich brother and Lazarus. He knows they have access to the Scriptures and we learn that they need to heed them and repent. Then there are the Pharisees, who loved riches and despised the Lord Jesus for whom riches were a means, not an end. They were not, in their hearts, interested in things eternal, which are unseen. Their desire was to be great in the sight of men, but Jesus said 'That which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God' (16:15 RV).

The outsiders of the portion would have been socially at the wrong end of the spectrum for the Pharisees. As well as Lazarus they include ten lepers, one being a Samaritan, a slave, a fraudulent

steward and a wife put away. But their presence in the portion tells us how much the Lord loves them, for He sees them afar off. Nothing escapes the attention of God who knows our hearts. He knows too of those alienated by society because of race or illness or poverty. He knows of those facing homelessness and unemployment and destitution. He knows of women left helpless by men's hardness of heart.

Relationships of fathers to sons and sons to brothers, of husbands and wives and of wives and adulterers are all here; also of the Lord and his disciples, of friends, and of brothers in the church. Also of employers and workers and of masters and slaves and those bound together by circumstance. There are virtues of repentance, forgiveness, faithfulness, honesty and trustworthiness brought before us in the Lord's words; and vices of wastefulness, faithlessness, dishonesty, self-serving, greed, selfishness and unthankfulness in men's actions.

And the Lord Jesus continues on the way to Jerusalem in the great divine purpose of salvation (17:11).

P.D.

From Study Groups

FAITHFULNESS IN SERVICE (Luke 16:1 - 17:19)

From Aberdeen: *Faithfulness in service* It is noteworthy that the Lord's teaching on forgiveness is so comprehensive that the time frame of 'one day' is used in the example of how ready we should be to forgive one another. Seven times in one day this brother trespasses against another. Seven times he repents. Seven times the trespassing brother is to be forgiven—on that same day (Luke 17:4)! Praise the Lord for requiring such patient forgiveness in disciples. What a standard for Christians to aspire to! Perhaps the apostles began to realise they had much to learn as they contemplated the Lord's teaching on forgiveness, and so their next request was 'Lord, increase our faith'.

The reply from the Lord about having faith as 'a grain of mustard seed' is surely a pointer for disciples to focus on Jesus, who is 'the author and finisher of faith' (the pronoun 'our' does not appear in the original—see the entry for 'Author' in *W.E. Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words*). We should look to Him and trust God rather than focus on our own variable faith (Heb. 12:2). The Lord expects disciples to do all that He commands in faith, and then to view such obedience as having 'done that which was our duty to do' (Luke 17:10 AV).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: The Lord continues this discourse, Luke using the word 'also' in 16:1 on the subject of wealth and riches. There are two things that the Jews (particularly the Pharisees) loved—respectability and money. They had the mindset that money was the key to heaven, the sign of salvation and God's favour (Mark 10:17- 27). Three dangers of wealth are highlighted: (1) wasting, (2) coveting, and (3) worshipping. 'The love of money is a root ...' (1 Tim. 6:10 RV). All that we have comes from God, and we are stewards of His possessions, not owners. We will have to give account of what we have done with what He has given to us. The steward was called to account, but was he lazy and proud? His plan was to minimise the damage to his employer's account, leaving him a smaller restitution to pay, but at the same time currying favour with several in the community after the incident was over [Comment 1]. His master's first client was instructed to settle his account for 50% of the total owed, possibly based on his ability to pay; the second settled for 80%. By applying the first rule in politics—'Always be generous with others' money'—he

would leave the position of steward to find help from grateful clients; but ironically he implicated them in this devious scheme. Jesus did not commend the steward for cheating his master, but for making good use of his opportunity. The master and steward were the same kind of people—unscrupulous in their dealings.

During this brief life we have the opportunity to use wealth to make ‘friends’ for God, friends whom we will meet in heaven. The people of this world are much better at seeing opportunities and profiting from them than are children of God (Eph. 5:15-17).

Three lessons that the Lord taught:

(1) If we were as eager and ingenious in attaining wisdom and goodness, in showing forgiveness and grace, as the unsaved are to obtain money, comfort and achievement in winning, our lives and relationships would show a dramatic change.

(2) How we handle the ‘little’ that we have at our disposal in this world determines how, or whether, we will handle ‘much’ in this realm and in the age to come.

Evil of this age: ‘that which is another’s’; ‘very little’; ‘unrighteous wealth’.

Kingdom of God: ‘that which is your own’; ‘much’; ‘true riches’.

(3) This part of the discourse finishes with a warning from the Lord that there can be no mixing of God and mammon—it’s either one or the other. He uses the terms ‘wealth’ and ‘money’ as a metonymy. In this case ‘money’ stands for the methods and values associated with the present age; ‘wealth’ refers to one’s devotion to material gain. Make no mistake, this is the world we inhabit and there is no other way. Either we serve God or we serve money; there can be no compromise (Mat. 6:19-24). In all matters as servants we must be subject to God. All our powers must be employed in His service. Thus we have no claim for any special praise or recompense for obedience, so that a serious humility is demanded of us (Luke 17:10). All will be revealed at the judgement seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

W. Paterson

From Belfast: This parable comes under the heading of contentious due to the disagreements pertaining to the heavenly meaning of the earthly story. Even the title itself has differing variations—the Shrewd Manager, Unfaithful Servant, Dishonest Manager, to name just a few. But one thing which stands out from all this ambiguity is the need to understand God’s deepest intentions and that which moves Him most deeply. To be shrewd means to understand and judge a situation quickly and to use

this understanding to one's own advantage. Certainly this is exactly how the manager reacted when he heard the master's accusation of wasting his possessions (v.1). He planned for his future, and being shrewd he used the means at his disposal to plan for his future wellbeing.

All we are and have—our talents, time and treasures—are entrusted to us by God, which we are to invest for God's kingdom and glory. Jesus tells us to learn from the people of this world, their zeal and vigour [Comment 2]; and if we pursued God's kingdom in the same way that they pursued profits and pleasures we would live in a completely different world. The unfaithful steward was to lose what he had spent his time building. He was to be separated from it with no hope of ever seeing it again.

But if we build using all that God has given us including worldly wealth, and we put it to good use by helping those in need, and in the furtherance of the gospel, then we will be 'received into eternal dwellings' (v.9 NIV). 'Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor ... the Christian should work as if all depended upon him, and pray as if it all depended upon God' (Spurgeon). Thomas Adams, the Puritan, also put it this way: 'To part with what we cannot keep, that we may get that we cannot lose, is a good bargain. Wealth can do us no good, unless it help us toward heaven.' How we long to hear these words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant' (Mat. 25:23 ESV)!

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *Believers' destinations* The Lord Jesus spoke about 'a certain rich man' and 'a certain beggar'. These were real people, not fictitious characters in some allegory of the afterlife. For this reason, we believe He gives a literal account of what happened at that time to people after death. The place to which Lazarus went is called 'Abraham's bosom' ('Abraham's side' NIV, ESV, et al.) where he was 'comforted'. The rich man went to Hades where he was 'in torments' and 'in anguish in this flame' (vv.23-24 RV).

We know from Psalm 16 and Acts 2 that the Lord went 'down' to the place called 'Sheol' in Hebrew, and 'Hades' in Greek after He died on the cross. However, we believe that He went to the upper part of Hades, where the rich man saw Lazarus in the distance in a place of comfort, in contrast to where the rich man found himself. Abraham told the rich man that there was 'a great gulf [i.e. 'a great chasm' NIV, ESV] fixed' between these two compartments. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus said to the thief on the cross, 'Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43), He was referring to that part of Hades where Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom—a Paradise,

a place of delights' (J. Miller, *Needed Truth*, 1961, pp.61-62). However, the same article also draws attention to the fact that 'the word paradise is used three times in the New Testament, in Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7. In each case it refers to a different place, each of which is a Paradise'. Further elucidation is found in 'Question and Answers', *Needed Truth*, 1951, pp.143-144.

We summarise our understanding of this important subject as follows. When Jacob saw Joseph's bloodstained coat he said, 'I shall go down to the grave [RVM Sheol] to my son mourning' (Gen. 37:35). From this we understand that he anticipated a going 'down' to that part of Sheol where the righteous dead (including the beggar Lazarus) in Old Testament times went. This was the same place to which the Lord Jesus and the penitent thief went after they died. The Lord called that place 'Paradise'.

In contrast, the Paradise to which Paul was 'caught up' (not 'down'), was 'the third heaven' (2 Cor. 12:2). This was not the temporary Paradise of 'upper' Sheol, from which the Lord rose triumphant on the third day, but was for Paul, 'a glimpse of the Divine presence, infinitely blessed and abiding' (J. Brown, *N.T.* 1951, p.144). We suggest that it was to this place that the Lord took the souls from 'upper' Sheol when He 'led captivity captive' (Eph. 4:8; Ps. 68:18) and is the place to which believers now go to be 'with Christ' (Phil. 1:23) when they die. Unbelievers who die today will still go down to 'lower' Sheol to await their resurrection to judgement in a coming day. In contradistinction to the foregoing is also a third Paradise which, we suggest, is in the eternal state: '... the Paradise of God' mentioned in Revelation 2:7; 22:1-2. Both refer to the tree of life, which is 'found on each side of the river of water of life which will proceed out of the throne of God and of the Lamb...' (J. Miller, 1961) [Comment 3].

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: *The dishonest manager* This passage is difficult to understand, as the Lord appears to be commending dishonest conduct and urging His disciples to do the same—which is inconceivable [Comment 4]. It may possibly be helpful to consider the expression 'unrighteous wealth' (v.9 ESV). Surely wealth *per se* is not unrighteous: it could be unrighteous if it were improperly gained [or improperly used—*Eds.*]. It was suggested that the dishonest manager had inflated the price of the goods to secure extra benefit for himself, which he was willing to give up to ingratiate himself with the debtors [see Comment 1]. The (earthly) master commended the dishonest manager for his 'shrewdness' (v.8), but we still could not see what parallel course of action we could take [Comment 5; see close of Comment 2 and Comment 4]. It has been

suggested that verse 8 could be taken as a question: 'Did the master commend ...?' but there is no textual evidence for this.

Another way of looking at the situation is by making a distinction between a parable and an allegory: a parable is intended to make a single point, whereas each element in an allegory has a corresponding element in its corollary. This is a parable: its whole point is to teach that worldly rogues will use money to secure friends. Christians should be equally inventive and single-minded in using their earthly wealth—which is a loan and a trust that may be withdrawn at short notice.

Destinations 'Abraham's side' only appears once in scripture, in Luke 16:22, whereas 'Hades' appears 9 times. There does not really seem to be enough evidence to make definite statements about specific destinations [see *B.S.* article noted in Comment 3].

Peter Hickling

From Derby: According to the passage, it seems as though the steward was ensuring that he had done what he could to survive after losing what he had. In this respect, Jesus could say that this steward was wiser ['in their own generation'—*Eds.*] than the children of light who are God's children. In one respect, it was possible for the steward to make shrewd decisions and be commended by a worldly master. But when it comes down to us as children of the light, we are dealing with what God has provided; we are to strive for commendation in God's eyes, for that is what matters in our lives here. In an example of earthly service the Lord was showing the Pharisees that if one can be faithful with a little, one could be faithful with a lot.

The kingdom of God belongs to God, but the kingdom of heaven is wider. In Matthew 11:12 the kingdom of heaven is the forceful focus of John's message, which required rapid and decisive action of repentance. There was a powerful progress of the kingdom taking place where certain people were developing an appreciation of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah [Comment 6]. The kingdom of heaven is made up of all believers wherever they may be, but the kingdom of God is believed to consist of people within the Fellowship [Comment 7].

There are two distinct destinations in eternity—certainly one is the everlasting torment of which all must be warned. Secondly, 'Abraham's bosom' is mentioned as a place of rest. However, the place is now Paradise, because the Lord could say to the thief on the cross that he would be with Him in Paradise [see Comment 3]. This has replaced Abraham's bosom, as the Lord is there and He has the pre-eminence. It does mention in the passage that Lazarus was carried away by the angels to

Abraham's bosom. Therefore, on our passing we shall be carried into the Lord's presence [Comment 8].

There is one thing that is clear: when one enters eternity it's too late to do anything about getting out of eternal torment. We are either with the Lord, or we face a lost eternity. John 8:24 states that unless we believe that Jesus is the one, we shall die in our sins. Paul preached about hope in Jesus Christ in his letters.

Robert Foster

From Greenock: *Dishonesty: a spiritual example?* The wealthy proprietor in the parable has already had the fraud of his steward brought to his attention. The subsequent actions of the steward in 'writing down' debts may well be a continuation of his fraud. He hopes by this action he will be welcome in some households after his dismissal. His employer acknowledges the earthly wisdom of making speedy preparation for the time after his dismissal but does not condone the ongoing fraud. At no point do we find our Lord advocating dishonesty.

The new life in a believer should bring out the best in us, not the worst. Lies are of the devil—the father of lies (John 8:44). The example of Ananias and Sapphira clearly shows the standards of honesty required of believers. Peter said, 'Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?' (Acts 5:1-11 RV). Our world would be a very different place if the crime of lying carried the same sentence they suffered!

Stewardship We can apply these lessons to our own lives: we are stewards of the riches entrusted to us. These are both the spiritual truths we seek to spread abroad in this world and also our time and our material substance. All that we do is laid bare before an all knowing God. We do not know when our stewardship is to be brought to an end. The words of the hymn—

'Nought that I have mine own I'd call,
I hold it for the Giver;
My heart, my strength, my life, my all,
Are His, and His forever'—

help us to see clearly our stewardship—that everything we have is from the Giver, the Lord Jesus.

Our stewardship should be active; there are works we are given to do, 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared

that we should walk in them' (Eph. 2:10). Care is for those in the church and also for the poor and needy. James states in very forceful language, 'If a brother or sister be naked, and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself' (James 2:15-17).

'Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me ... And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me' (Mat. 25:31-46). When we see a beggar could we give a 'breakfast bar'—inexpensive, nourishing and easily carried—or pass by on the other side? May God give us all the strength to speak the truth in love and for our faith to be alive!

Steve Henderson

From Halifax: *An unjust steward* To His disciples, Jesus then told of a steward accused of wasting his rich master's goods. The Greek word translated 'accused' (*diaballo*) means slander, where malice is implied, but not necessarily falsehood (*Vincent's Word Studies*). The unjust steward quickly resolved that, when cast out of his position, he would have somewhere to go (16:4). Jesus, relating the man's worldly wisdom which was admired by his master (v.8), spoke to His disciples of faithful service. F.W. Farrar observes: 'With the supreme and daring paradox ... He urged them to the foresight of a spiritual wisdom by an example drawn from the foresight of a criminal cleverness' (*The Life of Christ*, 1885, p. 295). Hearing Jesus' words, the covetous Pharisees derided or ridiculed Him (v.14) and He responded by saying, 'God knoweth your hearts' (v.15 KJV).

The Lord goes on to tell of a certain rich man—one who 'fared sumptuously every day' (v.19). Nothing is added to intimate that the man was born to a large estate, that he acquired it by irregular means, or that he possessed it with haughty contempt. Yet Abraham reminded him of the sufferings of Lazarus when he sat in his gate (v.25). The rich man, receiving good things in his life, had not been at all concerned with the welfare of a beggar. There was no need for Lazarus to be sent to appeal to the man's living brothers, for they had 'Moses and the prophets' (v.29). J.A. Bengel said, 'We are saved by faithful hearing, not by ghosts' (quoted in *The Life of Christ*, 1885, p. 296). Yet the dead were raised to life! Jesus' answer to John the Baptist's enquiry was:

‘The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them’ (Mat. 11:5).
Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan Alawaye: *Forcing into the kingdom* John was the end of the Law and the prophets. He was the one preaching about the kingdom of God. Some people were disciples of John before they knew Jesus. He (John) afterwards introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29; Mat. 11:12-13).

The decision to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord is not an easy one to make, unless the power of God is involved. Those who force their way into the kingdom are those who accept Christ as Lord. The wisdom of man cannot comprehend the gospel of Christ except by the working power of God manifested through the Spirit (Rom. 1:19- 22) [Comment 6]. The Pharisees, though knowledgeable, could not comprehend the truth of salvation and so could not embrace it because it sounded like foolishness to them (1 Cor. 1:18-19; John 8:56-59). Peter and those who went with him were astonished at this power in the lives of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48), who were Gentiles. It is only the power of God that converts and brings people into the kingdom. We should each appreciate the salvation of our soul and take it with all seriousness.

Dishonesty commended? The Lord did not commend the dishonest servant but was showing us the way of the children of the world (v.8). He wants us to learn from the wisdom used by the unjust steward. We live among unbelievers; the Lord wants us to know how to live among them. We need the wisdom of God to live peacefully with them and bring them to Christ. God wants us to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves. We should make use of every opportunity at our disposal to propagate the gospel. The people of the world always look for every opportunity to draw others to themselves just like the unjust steward did. The parable is a challenge to believers to learn how to deal wisely with people.

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: ‘Also’, in Luke 16:1, shows continuity with the previous teaching, and ‘wasting his possessions’ uses exactly the same descriptive word found in Luke 15:13 (Gk. *diaskorpizó*). Thus the consecutive accounts in these chapters are linked, dealing with the use and valuation of earthly things. Recovery from loss can result in rejoicing in heaven, and there is a supreme example of a person who squandered another’s wealth (his father’s), but repentantly sought servant status. But next we see a squanderer of his lord’s property who shows no evident repentance

and instead seeks to avoid the consequences of his past misdeeds. This leads to emphasis on different eternal outcomes. Luke 16 then concludes with a decisive challenge based on the fearful abode after death of someone else who had misused his stewardship.

So we must have the future in mind. Taking what the Lord says in Luke 16:9 as a literal command, we should help the poor with our earthly goods (cp. Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 19:17), valuing eternal reward. However, His words may in context be better explained as rhetorical irony preparing for the clearer and more challenging instruction in verses 10-13.

Luke 16:9 commences with an 'I say' statement, reminding us of the nine in Matthew 5:18-48, often followed by a startling dictum (like 'tear out your eye'). Likewise Luke 16:9 is perhaps not endorsing the steward, or the rich owner who commended him (both actually being included in the description 'sons of this world' (v.8)). Instead we may read verse 9 as irony, as we might put it: 'Based on this example (vv.1-8) those who focus on earthly comforts just need to give away other people's property so they can win a reception in the hereafter from those who they unjustly benefited!' Disciples seeing the irony should answer: 'Of course not!' (There are many other examples of irony used in divine statements.) Unsurprisingly, the Lord's unequivocal following dictum (vv.10-13) drew the ire of the money-loving Pharisees (v.14).

If 16:9 is simply a literal command, that raises questions.

- (1.) If the principal lesson is to be generous to the poor, why is none of the people in Luke 16:1-8 described as poor? [Is it not a lesson in having proper regard to material wealth, that we may help others when we can, no matter their station or circumstances in life?—Eds.]
- (2.) Is true repentance achieved at another's expense and for one's own present material gain? [Surely not—Eds.]
- (3.) How could beneficiaries of the unjust steward's scheme excuse themselves from complicity with his unrighteousness, or merit divine approval? [How would they know that he was 'looking after himself' in his financial dealings with them? See also Comment 1—Eds.]
- (4.) Are unreasonable and unstated assumptions required to endorse the steward's shrewdness (e.g. he simply takes off a premium he had unjustly billed, and/or enhances the rich man's reputation for generosity)? [No. An alternative explanation is that the employer was simply glad to get something rather than encounter the problem of trying to retrieve monies owed by his own efforts—Eds.]

(5.) Was reception into ‘eternal tabernacles’ a blessing that the steward’s accomplices had the ability to give (and note the contrast between ‘their houses’ in v.4 and v.9)? [We cannot assume the debtors had suspicions about the steward’s actions, so to name them ‘accomplices’ is unjustified. The ‘they’ in verse 9 are others than the debtors of verse 5. This would broaden out to those who eternally benefit from kind actions of disciples. On the other hand, the ‘they’ may be the general welcome awaited and given by people who already are in the eternal tabernacles, not the friends of verse 9—Eds.]

(6.) The ‘eternal dwellings’ mentioned—are they the abodes of those like Lazarus in verse 22, or the rich man of verse 23? [The abode of the righteous—Eds.]

7. Could what the steward did somehow really be an example of being ‘faithful’ rather than unfaithful with someone else’s property, in regard to the Lord’s conclusions in verses 11 and 12? [Comment 9.]

Geoff Hydon

From Okorikpehre: *Faithfulness in service (Luke 17:10)* The parable in no way undermines our service to God. Our labour for sure is ‘not in vain’. We are in profitable service! The Lord was teaching about right attitude. Having been purchased at such a high price, the disciple should in humility and obedience give back to God, not expecting instant gratification. Paul challenged the Corinthians, ‘What do you have that you did not receive?’ (1 Cor. 4:7 NIV). John says, ‘we love because he first loved us’ (1 John 4:19). All that we can possibly do, whether physical or spiritual, is guided by what He requires us to do. We do not gain or merit beyond our call to duty [Comment 10]. Our motivation for service should be love for what He has done rather than obligation or simply for what we will gain. It was Robert G. LeTourneau, the Christian inventor, who said, ‘If you give because it pays, it won’t pay!’

We are ‘unprofitable servants’ in the sense of not profiting God in any way. God is inherently self-sufficient and self-sustaining. To put it bluntly, God has no need for man. ‘Can a man be of benefit to God? Can even a wise man benefit him? What pleasure would it give the Almighty if you were righteous? What would he gain if your ways were blameless?’ (Job 22:2-3).

If a servant can faithfully serve his earthly master who is thankless, we ought to show more resilience in serving and obeying our Lord, because He will not forget our ‘labour of love’. The Lord brought His disciples to a higher level of relationship when He said, ‘I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you’ (John 15:15).

When the servant had done all, he was to declare his unworthiness. We took note of the 'all'. It was not left to the servant to choose what part of the master's instructions to obey. Although Israel disappointed God in many ways, they had promised to do 'everything the LORD had said' (Ex. 19:8). May we be reminded of the silent, but implied, promise at baptism to follow Him all the days of our lives.

Abraham Elijah; Lawrence Onyokoko

From Ravulapalem: The proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom of God began in the days of John the Baptist; until that time there was 'the law and the prophets'. The law means the first five books of the Bible and the prophets are the seventeen books starting from Isaiah through Daniel and Hosea to Malachi [Comment 11]. Jesus himself referred to these in Luke 16:31 and 24:25-27. The idea here is that before John the kingdom of God could only be viewed in the light of prophecy; but now that it was being preached by the Lord Himself men were pressing into it with ardour resembling violence or desperation. It expresses the earnestness that men must have in getting rid of sin, of all satanic powers, of the world, and in standing true when relatives and others oppose them (Mat. 10:37).

Jesus spoke these words to the Pharisees who were covetous (money-lovers—2 Tim. 3:2), enjoying the mammon of unrighteousness when they derided Him (Luke 23:35). In Greek literature *biazo* ('press' or 'force') is most often used in the unfavourable sense of attack or forcible restraint, as the noun in Matthew is used in a negative or pejorative sense, describing a violent, impetuous person. However, the Lord said, 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well' (Mat. 6:33 NIV). We must press into God's plan and His desire for us, even aggressively seeking the kingdom with all our hearts.

Jude, while writing to the people who are called 'loved and preserved in Christ' (v.1), says 'For certain men ... have secretly slipped in among you' (v.4). Paul writes to the Galatians in 2:4, '... because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves', and to the church in Corinth about his sufferings as 'in danger from false brothers' (2 Cor. 11:26). Peter warned the citizens of the kingdom to lay aside all malice, guile, hypocrisies and envies (1 Pet. 2:1). They might even have entered the church by force without any transformation. So, we too, must be careful about such [Comment 12].

S. J. M. Edward

From Surulere: *Positive spiritual example?* The Lord's nature is one of absolute holiness and purity. 'Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my holy one? ...

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wickedness' (Hab. 1:12- 13 NKJV). 'For thus says the high and lofty one, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place' (Is. 57:15). The Lord commands not only 'therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour. For we are members of one another' (Eph. 4:25); He desires also: 'truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part you will make me know wisdom' (Ps. 51:6).

It would be inconsistent with the attributes of God for the Lord Jesus to hold up this thieving steward as a positive spiritual example. He distinctly declares that: 'Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD' (Prov. 12:22), and He rebuked the people of Israel in the days of Jeremiah thus: 'yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness' (Jer. 22:17).

The Lord's intent in the parable was to highlight, for the benefit of the disciples, how they should apply themselves in the spiritual enterprise that the Lord had called them into. The dishonest steward, in the face of impending financial calamity occasioned by his greed and wastefulness, sought to provide for his inevitable dismissal by expanding his duplicity to gain the favour of his would-be benefactors. He was thus making friends by the mammon of unrighteousness, but it was never going to get him into any eternal dwellings when it was gone (Luke 16:9). The Lord's point was to spur His disciples to being more perceptive and to take advantage of the spiritual opportunities that are availed to them. Indeed, the sons of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light (v.8); yet the Lord enjoins us to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Mat. 10:16).

Frederick F. Ntido

From Warri: *Faithfulness in Service* '... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Gen. 18:25 NKJV). Far be it that the Judge of all the earth would commend fraud or dishonesty. The Lord did not in any means commend dishonesty as a positive spiritual truth. This parable of the unjust steward was not found to be like the other parables of our Lord. We might have some confusion by the story, yet the Pharisees and scribes understood the Lord's message as being primarily meant for them.

It was not the Master (Jesus) who commended the steward in verse 8, but the steward's employer: 'So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly.' The Lord, rather than setting before us this unjust steward as an example in cheating his master, or to commend any dishonesty, taught us that the ungodly people in this world know how to get the most from worldly things. They are

more careful than believers, more foresighted in the things they do (including wrongs). But the so-called godly people don't know how to get the most from spiritual things: 'For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light'. As for the Pharisees, they also were squandering precious resources. Some of us believers, too, need to be ready to use smartly all the opportunities God has given to us in this world. Our time is indeed short!

Shadrack Obarogbi

COMMENTS

1. (Aberkenfig): It has been suggested that the reduction in the debt was in fact a cancellation of the interest element of the loan. Charging interest was forbidden by the Law (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-38) but in practice usury was applied in ingenious ways. These arrangements were negotiated by stewards in order to allow moneylenders to deny any knowledge of unlawful schemes. So the unrighteous steward would have had specific knowledge of each loan, both in terms of the capital borrowed and the obligations for repayment. By cancelling the interest sum, he not only gained favour with the debtors, by also remained above the reproach of the rich man who was prevented from complaining without revealing his own breach of the law (see *'What the Bible Teaches: Luke'*, N. Crawford, p.267 (which cites *Edersheim's Jesus the Messiah*, pp. 395-397)).

J.T.N.

2. (Belfast): This is not however what is brought before us here. That the sons of the world are wiser for their own than the sons of light leads not to a modelling of our behaviour on theirs so sons of light become as sons of the world, but to standards of integrity which befit sons of the light.

P.D.

It is hard to see the manager as entirely corrupt. Dishonest men can operate with commendable virtues, e.g. punctuality or wisdom. The commendation of wisdom shown in the parable (even though turned to selfish ends) does not make those men honest in their aims; nor, however, is their wise example of no value.

M.A.

3. (Buckhaven): It is quite clear from scripture that the heavens comprise a multiplicity of locations / strata, all divinely arranged in perfect settings by the God of impeccable order (Deut. 10:14; Ps. 68:33; 148:4; 1 Cor. 14:33,40). When the Lord

spoke on the cross to the repentant malefactor of his assured place in Paradise on that very day of His death, it would appear more than likely to refer to the place of Abraham's bosom, to which the righteous dead up to the time of the Lord's death had their temporary resting place, often categorised as 'upper Sheol' (O.T.) / 'upper Hades' (N.T.) (Luke 16:22; cp. Rom. 3:25; Ps. 16:10). The Lord descended into that part of the earth for three days and three nights to carry out whatever work had to be done, and then ascended from there, leading upper Sheol's inhabitants, it would seem, to that compartment in heaven to which the apostle Paul was caught up—the third heaven (Mat. 12:40; Eph. 4:8-10; 2 Cor. 12:2). Again, in all likelihood, this was a prepared abode for the blest who were 'released' from upper Sheol. As quoted, it may also be the location for believers who have died / fallen asleep through Jesus, though this is by no means certain, as at the Lord's coming to the air, those raptured will be His bride, the church which is His body, which if sharing the same location, would imply that only a percentage of those in the third heaven will be called to meet Him (1 Thes. 4:14,16-17; 1 Cor. 15:20, 22-23). In other words, those who die in Christ may well occupy another part of heaven. The question also arises, if the Lord completely overcame the evil one through His death, why would it take all that time (3 days and 3 nights) for Him to secure the release and transference of those in upper Sheol to a far better place where there would no longer be that chasm where the comforted and the condemned had some knowledge of each other's mode of existence, being able to see and have some form of communication, such as the previously rich man seeing Lazarus in the prophet's bosom, and directly conversing with Abraham himself (v.23)?

R.B.F.

In support of this, and establishing the different location of believers after the Lord's resurrection as being with Him, see *B.S.* 1992, pp.111-112, 119-121: 'Paradise and the location of the dead', J.D. Terrell.

M.A.

4. (Cromer): Although tempting to read the parable in this way, the Lord was quite clear that the steward was 'dishonest' (v.8). The purpose of the parable is not found in replicating the steward's behaviour, but in finding present opportunities to lay up blessing for the future. If even dishonest heathens do that, how much more should we who apprehend such a bright eternity before us? See Halifax, para. 1 and Mount Forest, paras. 1-2.

J.T.N.

5. (Cromer): Quite! First and foremost the story is a parable and not an allegory, as friends bring out. And in any case the employer's comment does not move the narrative forward but rather forms a platform for the Saviour to address His own. From the employer's words, and our Lord's comments on them, we see here in Scripture what we know very well from experience. The sons of this world will always naturally oppose what the sons of light do and think, particularly when it brings them to the light, but will find appeal in or admire what their fellows do. In the light of such disadvantage the wise witnessing believers do what they can to befriend, using this world's resources for the kingdom's sake.

P.D.

Is the Lord not simply saying that as disciples we are to handle this world's possessions / financial wealth, described as 'mammon of unrighteousness' in that it can be used so easily in a wrong way—as opposed to the true riches which He entrusts to us to employ wisely—in a way that is worthy of Him? The lesson being that whatever we have from Him to work with has an eternal consequence and value, whereas earthly and material riches will eventually fail, but put to the best use here will ultimately benefit ourselves as disciples and others (v.9). See also Comment 3.

R.B.F.

6. (Derby and others): *Forcing one's way into the kingdom* Amplifying this, a clear understanding of this difficult verse, Luke 16:16, seems to me that to enter the kingdom of God demands determined commitment, entailing a struggle to embark on overcoming the old self, and then to maintain the laws of the kingdom—'through many tribulations' (Acts 14:22); cp. Ravulapalem para. 1. Although repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ is a message of good news for the believer, repentance must be deeply sincere and is ultimately granted by God, while following Christ in this world is a daily battle. The relevance of John the Baptist is that he called men to equally searching repentance according to the Law, and pointed to Christ as the one to follow, who kept the law in perfectness, one day to bear away the sin of the world.

M.A.

7. (Derby): What is said here of the kingdom of heaven is true of the body of Christ rather than the kingdom of heaven, for the body of Christ is made up of all believers wherever they may be but the sphere of the kingdom of heaven is this world and it is not synonymous with the Body. And what is said here of the kingdom of God is true of the church of God rather than the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is that which is given to us (Mat. 21:43; Luke 12:32) and received (Heb. 12:28), being

God's rule among us as a gathered together people. (See Comment 1, *B.S.* Jan 2018.)

P.D.

As said here, the preaching and teaching of the kingdom of God demands decisive action and commitment from those who hear it, welcome it, and embrace it (Luke 16:16; Acts 20:25-27).

8. (Derby): An interesting point is made here about angelic beings having some involvement in the 'transportation' of the righteous to their place of comfort, awaiting the day of resurrection. There is no doubt these wonderful ministering spirits have a very active association with saints as they did with the Lord Jesus in his earthly days, but we cannot be certain about this being applicable in every case (cp. Heb. 1:14).

R.B.F.

9. (Mount Forest): The simple straightforward reading may be best. The Lord Jesus speedily draws a word picture for us of a man who made friends by means of that for which he was responsible as steward so that he could be received by those he helped. Likewise we should make friends (with true friendship, though for the Lord's sake) with the expectation of being received by them in due course in heavenly tabernacles. Anything beyond that, which makes the steward and the master models of behaviour when the Lord Jesus clearly describes them as sons of the world, distinct from sons of the light, seems to be complicating unnecessarily.

P.D.

Those who are in uncontrolled debt are at least on the road to poverty, if not already there. See also part 2 of Comment 2.

10. (Okorikpehre): *Our duty* True indeed. It may help to see that 'duty' is not a bare minimum, but in the eyes of the Lord is what is due to Him, what is worthy of Him—i.e. our very best service. It is also very precious to do in addition for God what He has not specifically required of us, while in accord with His will, as when the Old Covenant worshipper offered a burnt or whole offering out of pure appreciation.

11. (Ravulapalem): 'The Prophets' also traditionally included Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.

M.A.

12. (Ravulapalem): I suggest that the Pharisees from whom the kingdom of God would be taken (Mat. 21:43) were not, being sons of hell (23:15), relinquishing it easily (12:28-29), and that since He is addressing them it is to this that entering violently refers. Cp. Comment 6.

P.D.

Luke 16:16 I would understand to be what is written in Comment 7.

R.B.F.

FROM LUKE'S LIFE-SCENES

What is within you These passages from Luke brim over with possibilities. Think first of the power of what the Lord said is within the believer: we walk through life with the power to show the qualities of having God as king in our minds—our words—our actions. What an effect for lasting good in this needy world and those whom we impact day by day! Next comes the power—greater than the sum of its channels—of being added not only to the Lord, but to those who belong in His fellowship of churches, of lampstands to shed the light of His kingdom into the darkness around! This is all inside, until in obedience you and I let it out. Then, like the man who found sight and glorified God, others will be caused to praise Him too.

Children called and touched Luke's account of this great classroom for the Lord's disciples (then and today) features the voice of divine Love calling those children to Him. Did they ever forget that day, that voice, that touch? Perhaps we'll meet each one, and their mothers, in the world to come. So are we prepared to go out today in childlike faith, obeying the call of our Lord, while staying close by His side, hearts touched by our Teacher? All

honour to those who give hours to looking after children in such a way as to teach them to hear that same call; then also to encourage youth and adults to learn such trust, and find such blessing.

He came running to kneel before the Ruler of all It is Mark who tells us this about the rich ruler, who nevertheless went away sorrowful, poor and ill-governed. Pride in having attended to some parts of the Law blinded him to failure in the remaining key issue. We have no assurance that he found a second chance when he heard about the cross that darkened his land, and the mystery of the empty tomb, on the day when other rich men gave of their finest.

Luke's liking for placing the future beside the present The disappointment over a rich young man gives way to the promise of the rich future for those who make sacrifice today for the Lord's sake. Luke has shown this interest from the prophecies of Anna (2:38) and John (3:16-17), through the teaching of the cross (9:23-27), to the parables and prophecies that include future reward or judgement. M.A.

From Study Groups

‘THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN THE MIDST OF YOU’ (Luke 17:20-18:43)

From Aberdeen: *The phrase ‘the kingdom of God is within you’ (RV) is surely indicative of the spiritual character of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not associated with physical location (Lo, here! Or, There!). Luke continues in a similar line of thought with his next point that disciples in a future time will be desiring to see ‘one of the days of the Son of Man’ (Luke 17:22). In this situation, prior to the return of the Son of Man to reign on earth, disciples should not allow themselves to be misled by those who will be saying, ‘Lo, there! Lo, here!’ because the Son of Man will appear ‘as the lightning’ appears in the sky and thus there will be no need for anyone to move to a specific location to see Him (17:24). [Cp. Comments 2 and 4.]*

The significant repetition of the phrase ‘the days of the Son of Man’ seems to take account of the interruption of Jesus’ days on earth—for His life was ‘taken from the earth’ (Acts 8:33)—and His appearing a second time to judge the world. The thread of ‘the Son of Man’ is continued again in Luke 18:8 in the matter of disciples being exhorted to persistent prayer. Here we find prayer being linked with faith and the assurance that the Son of Man will certainly return to earth, since God has marked the day when suffering saints of tribulation days will be answered with speedy deliverance.

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: *The importance of prayer* There is little doubt that God desires to hear His people pray. Ephesians 6:10-20 describes the armour of God, of which the disciple must avail himself on a daily basis. A vital part is found in verses 18-19: ‘praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel ...’ (ESV). If God has provided us with such a protection through the Spirit working within us, then we must avail ourselves of it constantly.

In Revelation 12:10 ‘the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.’ This shows that the adversary is not slow in highlighting the failings of God’s people: How much more then should we present ourselves at the throne of grace to supplicate our God on our own and others’ behalf?

Isaiah 62:6-7 exhorts us in this way: 'you who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest ...' Such is the faithful constancy that is required in our prayer life as disciples today: 'Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you' (1 Thes. 5:17-18). Notice, however, that it is 'God's will in Christ Jesus' that we should practise without ceasing this glorious privilege of being before the Throne in prayer.

It is plain that our prayers are most effective when we pray in accordance with God's will. Romans 1:9 shows the direct link between the unceasing prayer of the apostle coupled to the will of God in the matter of his visit to the saints in Rome. This is made wonderfully sure by the words of Romans 8:26-27. 'For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.' Again, it is praying in the Spirit according to the will of God that produces blessing.

Then we see from Abraham's intercessions for the people of Sodom in Genesis 18 (probably with Lot and his family very much in mind) how God was mercifully prepared to relent of His judgements on the wicked of that place, in response to His servant's pleadings, even though we may be tempted to think that Abraham stopped too soon: perhaps a lesson for us to pray without ceasing! Then again, when an answer is given, we should be prepared to accept God's will without attempting to change His mind; witness Paul's pleadings regarding his 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12:8-9).

It is questionable whether Moses' intercession on Israel's behalf actually changed God's intention to destroy the people, or whether there was an element of testing in God's proposal to make Moses into a great nation (see Ex. 32; cp. Ps. 106:45 with reference to God's covenant relationship) [Comment 1].

Edwin Stanley

From Belfast: *The disciple's view* 'When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost' (Billy Graham). The disciples and most Jews thought that wealth was a sign of God's blessing, and to a certain degree this is true until your perspective on treasures switches from heaven to earth.

The rich young ruler possessed a lot of things and was used to having possessions. He thought he had it good and he just needed to do another thing or two to possess eternal life. He was sincere in his thinking that he had kept the commandments, but

he was sincerely wrong, as human goodness deceives us about our true heart condition. Jesus showed him that in his heart he was an idolater who worshipped his money more than God, which is why he went away downcast: he was sad because he had much wealth.

Jesus taught the need of right relationship with God in the present time so as to spend eternity with Him in the future. It could be said that sin is the second most powerful force in the universe, for it sent Jesus to the cross. But one force is greater—the love of God. At the first sign of sin we should change tack immediately lest we become ensnared. And how easily we are, if we are not careful! Psalm 1:1 demonstrates this all too clearly. Notice the progression of a sinner who walks, stands and sits in the seat of mockers. At first glance, as they are walking by, they see what is happening and decide to stop and stand, taking a closer look; before they know it they are seated amongst them. Blessed are they who don't take a second glance but turn and flee.

Remember Lot's wife! (Luke 17:32) Being specifically told to escape with urgency and not look back, Lot's wife appears to have failed on both counts. 'But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back' (Gen.19:26 ESV). Her husband was in front of her, therefore she was evidently lagging behind and not urgently fleeing for her life (19:17). Lingering, she gave one last glance at the world she had known and loved. As Spurgeon says, 'she did look back, and thus proved that she had sufficient presumption in her heart to defy God's command, and risk her all—to give a lingering love glance at the condemned and guilty world. By that glance she perished.'

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *Jesus, 'Son of David'* 'Have mercy on me ... thy faith hath made thee whole' (Luke 18:38,42). Jesus said "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains" (John 9:39,41 NIV).

The blind man in Luke 18 recognised that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah, in contrast to the Pharisees, to whom the Lord said after He opened the eyes of another blind man (in John 9), 'your guilt remains.' In other words, they were spiritually blind and remained so, even though they claimed to have divine enlightenment.

To faithful Jews, the words 'Son of David' signified their coming Messiah, of whom

the prophets had spoken (as these and other references show: Gen. 49:10; Ps. 110:1; Is. 9:6-7; Mic. 5:2-6). By invoking this name as he repeatedly implored the Lord, the blind man signalled his conviction—already politically sensitive—that this man was David’s son and David’s Lord, Immanuel, the long awaited Saviour of Israel. It has been well said that the Lord Jesus could not walk past a cry for mercy; but when coupled with faith, all the more reason for Him to stop and do what the blind man craved the most. When the Lord said ‘your faith has made you whole’, He meant ‘your faith in me the Son of God, the living embodiment and fulfilment of “all that the prophets have spoken!”’ (Luke 24:25).

Everyone exercises faith We do it every day when we take minor (or occasionally major) risks in daily life. But saving faith requires something more. ‘Belief cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of Christ’ (Rom. 10:17 RV). When the Holy Spirit brings a person face to face with the living word of God, as He did with this blind man, then the faith that saves becomes possible. Saving faith may take place when the eyes of our heart are opened by the Holy Spirit to see Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. This is the point at which we can choose to receive Him into our hearts—or not. Faith is the decisive action by which we lay hold on Him, just as we might step onto a bus which we believe will take us to our destination. Acknowledging Jesus as the Son of David was a very public and decisive laying hold on Christ by faith; the man ‘confessed with his mouth Jesus as Lord’ (Rom. 10:9). Christ recognised his faith and made him whole, just as He did when He felt power going out from Him when the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of His garment—to whom also He said: ‘thy faith hath made thee whole’ (Luke 8:48).

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: *The future kingdom* It is suggested that Luke 17:22-37 does not refer to the coming of the Lord to the air for His Church—which we read about in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. This is the next significant event in the prophetic calendar, which we eagerly await (Phil. 3:20-21). It is suggested, however, that these verses refer to the time some seven years later when the Lord Jesus returns to earth as Son of Man to judge the living nations and to set up His kingdom on earth. This is the beginning of the period that Scripture refers to as ‘the Day of the Lord’ (1 Thes. 5:1-3 NIV). Previous to that appearance, the world will be going about its business as usual, just as it did in the days of Noah (v.27) or Lot (v.28). Then the Lord will suddenly appear like a flash of lightning to call to Himself believers living on earth at that time, when He will set up His kingdom.

Persistence in prayer The Lord told this parable to show His disciples that they should

always pray and not give up (18:1). The unjust judge was moved to act on the widow's behalf because he was annoyed by her persistence and wished to be rid of her. On the other hand, our God could not be more different from the unjust judge, for He is perfect justice personified, and furthermore, He loves us and will grant our requests according to His perfect will, and in His own perfect time. The Scripture says 'do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God' (Phil. 4:6). If there is something on our hearts we are crying to God about, then the message of this parable is, 'Don't give up!'

Our attitude in prayer The Pharisee was full of himself as he came to pray, whereas the tax collector knew he had nothing to boast of. On the contrary, he stood at a distance and poured out his heart in confession of sin: 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.' The verb used here for 'be merciful' means 'be propitiated'. How thankful we should be that the Lord Jesus has offered Himself to God on our behalf to give satisfaction for our sin! He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins 'and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world' (1 John 2:2).

John Parker

From Derby: The events described by the Lord are about His second coming to earth. According to the context of what is written, the Lord states that before these things happen, He must suffer many things. Then after an undisclosed time, He will return, illuminating the darkness, and be revealed on this earth. The Lord also refers to Lot's wife, who, by looking back longingly, was turned into a pillar of salt. Therefore, this will be a day of judgement for all who refuse to believe as evil is eliminated. The passage also indicates that what the world has adopted as normal everyday living will come to a sudden end.

The coming of the Son of Man will be at the point when the nations are gathered around Israel. The one that is left will enter the kingdom and the other one will be taken out of the way for judgement. That phase of the kingdom will last for a thousand years. Over the past few hundred years, advances in technology have made it possible for every eye to see the Lord when He comes to the earth to reign [Comment 2]. God will respond to constant pleading, but it will be according to His will, not ours. If our will has become closely aligned with the will of God, then we will know what to pray for. We are to persevere in prayer, but be willing to acknowledge the will of God.

In the apostles' writings, they are praying for the state of the churches, relating to how the Word is spread, though sometimes focussed on individuals [cp. this way of understanding 1 Thes. 1:2—Eds.]. Paul's prayers were wide as opposed to narrow and

inward-looking. The Lord did speak to His disciples about how they were intended to work for Him through prayer and fasting (e.g. Mark 9:29).

The blind man probably knew David's greater Son was coming. Also in Luke 4:18 recovery of sight to the blind was mentioned in what Jesus was going to do. It may have been that in his blind state more had been revealed to him than to sighted people.

Robert Foster

From Greenock: *Luke 17:22-37* looks forward to the final week of Daniel's 70 weeks (Dan. 9: 26-27). The Father has at last sent His Son to claim His bride; but the bridegroom had come secretly, unexpectedly, suddenly, and He had found many sleeping and most unprepared for the wedding. Would the bride of Christ, whenever He came, ever have been prepared for His coming? Whether sleeping or awake, the bridegroom will take all of His own with Him to heaven. He had told His disciples to wait and to watch for His coming, but He had kept them waiting so long that many had been caught unawares. We know, however, that His coming draws nearer every day. What will we be doing when He comes? Will we be doing things that please or displease Him, or will we have ceased to long for His coming?

After the Rapture, at God's appointed time the Antichrist or 'man of sin' and the false prophet will be revealed. Satan, having been restrained by God for so long, will be unleashed upon the world. Knowing that he has but a short time, his fury will create havoc upon the inhabitants of the world who have sown the wind, rejected Christ, and will reap the whirlwind from the one whom they chose instead (John 5:43). 'Then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be' (Mat. 24:21 RV). The armies of the world will descend upon little Israel to destroy her, but God will destroy her enemies at Armageddon. Antichrist's kingdom will be totally subdued. There will be an intervening period between the Lord's coming as Son of Man and the Millennium because it will take time for Him to restore perfect order out of chaos.

'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:8 NIV). Yes! There will be the greatest revival that there has ever been on the earth when the 144,000 witnesses—12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel—will preach the gospel and multitudes will be saved (Rev. 7). There will be a great harvest of souls in the Tribulation, when the Lord Jesus comes with all His saints (1 Thes. 3:13). 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus'—to the air and to the earth (Rev. 22:20) [Comment 3].

John Peddie

From Halifax: When Jesus departed from Capernaum many people had followed Him into a desert place, hoping to persuade Him to stay with them (Luke 4:42). To these, Jesus said: 'I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent' (v.43 KJV). Later on, Jesus taught His disciples to pray, saying, 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth' (11:2; cp. Mat. 6:10).

Knowing well that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom in challenge to them, the Pharisees now demanded an answer, asking when the kingdom of God should come (Luke 17:20). 'There was a certain impatience,' writes F. W. Farrar, 'a certain materialism, possibly also a tinge of sarcasm and depreciation in the question' (*The Life of Christ*, pp. 300-1). It was as though they were saying, 'When will this preaching end and the actual time arrive?' Of course Jesus did not mean by His reply that the kingdom was inside the Pharisees; most of them were unbelievers. The Lord's words 'within you' (v.21) are here better translated 'in the midst of you' (see Thayer, *Lexicon*, p. 218), or as the NIV margin, 'among you'. The kingdom was in their midst in the person of the King, with His disciples. For, as He said, 'But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (11:20 ESV) [Comment 4].

The day of the LORD In the days of Noah as in the days of Lot, people went about their ordinary business. 'They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage' (17:27 RV). 'Likewise ... they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded' (v.28). The Greek use of asyndeton here, effectively gives the impression of 'continually repeated activities' (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, 1984, p.998). This is how it shall be until the day when, suddenly, 'the Son of man is revealed' (v.30), i.e. 'the day of the LORD' (Zech. 14:1-3)—'That great and notable day' (Acts 2:20).

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): The event being described in Luke 17:22-31 is the Rapture of the saints. The event would be sudden. In the time of Noah, people despised all warnings; so also in the time of Lot [Comment 5]. Inasmuch as we do not know what day it will be, we are being reminded of these past events to challenge us to prepare and pay attention to the word of God so that we would not be caught off guard (Luke 17:31-33; Mat. 24:42-44). There would not be time to prepare to make amendments (1 Thes. 4:13-18) [Comment 6].

God's response to human needs Jesus himself confirmed from the parable (Luke 18:1) that the answer to the question is, Yes. God's hand can be moved by our persistence in prayer. Though the judge did not want to act, he was forced by the widow's

persistence. If the judge could be moved, how much more our God (11:5-13)? What strengthens our faith is our trust in God (1 Pet. 5:7; Heb. 13:5). We must believe that the one we go to can do it even before our going to Him. We must not get weary of going to God even when faced with previous disappointment. It is, however, important to note that we are not to pray for just anything, but according to the will of God (1 John 5:14; James 4:3). Even Jesus had to bow to the will of God the Father (Mat. 26:39). It is when we ask according to the desire of God, that we will receive [Comment 7]. Because Solomon so asked, he was granted much more (2 Chr. 1:6-12). We should therefore not be disappointed when it seems our prayers are not answered.

The blind man's insistence Though blind, this man was not deaf. He must have heard about Jesus and saved it in his memory (Mat. 1:1-25; Rom. 10:12-14); hence when he heard it was Jesus of Nazareth he knew He was the Son of David from what he had been told. Also, when Jesus came, He was widely known and distinguished from others by signs and wonders. We should, therefore conclude that there is no excuse for any man not to know Christ if a blind man could. This blind man, though lacking the seemingly most important of the five senses (sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touch) had so much faith. He had never seen Jesus perform signs and wonders, but nonetheless believed Him. He had a strong faith that would not accept being silenced (Luke 18:38-39). He was therefore healed through his faith (18:42).

Peter established that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 9:20; Mat. 16:15-16) while the blind man established His being the Son of Man. Though physically blind he was not spiritually blind (John 9:39-41).

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: *The coming of the Son of Man* We should not be surprised that the days leading to the return of Christ as Son of Man look like our own times. Matthew 24 provides more detail than Luke 17, and 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12 adds explanation. Modern communication makes people more aware, though hardened, by the occurrence of natural disasters and wars, but some of the precursors are more everyday events, like marriages. The force of the latter is that humankind will tend to go on regardless. Even the Lord's coming to the air, and the vanishing of those in Christ, will have been ignored by deluded people who don't want to believe.

Luke 17:37 (like Mat. 24:28) includes the Lord's statement about the vultures (eagles, same Greek word) around the carcass (body). Some may misapply John 6:53 and think birds feeding on the body depict saints feeding on Christ! Or could it be

about Romans destroying Jerusalem in AD 70 (with eagles on their standards)? No: the context is the Lord's second coming to earth. Is it a proverb based on Job 39:30, and highlighting speed, like vultures finding carrion? That seems reasonable, but then the Lord would be answering the questions 'When?' or 'How?', whereas the disciples asked 'Where are they taken' (implied from v.36) [Comment 8]. The ones who are left are like those left safe in the ark with Noah (v.27 and Mat. 24:38-39); the flood took the rest away in judgment.

Is, then, the primary lesson: there is again nowhere to hide at that time? Christ is simply indicating the impossibility of avoiding a divinely prescribed outcome. No one will be a match for angels who will subsequently snatch them away to judgment (Mat. 24:31). Fleeing will have been a desperate course, and fraught with difficulties (though flight is the correct response for the faithful at the beginning of these times, assisted by what is pictured as a 'great eagle'—Rev. 12:14). The answer the Lord seems to be reinforcing is that for the unbeliever nowhere is safe, and the outcome is inevitable [Comment 9].

Thus, as well as looking back to Job, perhaps there is a helpful example from David's comparable words to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, especially verse 46. We may see in Goliath's strong opposition a picture of the apparently insurmountable strength of the enemy opposing the holy people prior to the return of the Son of Man. Christ is also uniquely Son of David, inasmuch as David is a type of the one who would follow triumphantly in his kingly line, according to the flesh (Rom.1:3) [How appropriate, then, the acclaim of the blind man to the 'Son of David' in chapter 18!—*Eds.*]. Thus, we may see an element of longer term prophetic truth in David's words: 'This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.' The presence of the 'man after God's own heart' would be marked by the inevitable demise of God's enemies.

Geoff Hydon

From Okorikpehre: *Prayer* God's response to human need can, but does not necessarily, depend on our persistent prayer. The Lord's question after the parable, 'will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones...?' (Luke 18:7 NIV), indicates that God honours persistence in prayer. Prayer can change the one praying by deepening fellowship with the Lord, but there is no guarantee that it will always change the mind of God [see Comment 7].

Jacob's wrestling with the man till dawn and his insistence, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me' (Gen. 32:26-28) was viewed as a metaphor for persistent praying. The outcome was positive—'You have struggled with God and with men and have overcome' [Comment 10]. Similarly, when Hezekiah was told to put his house in order because God was going to call him home (2 Kin. 20:1-6), he pleaded with God and had a 15 year bonus as an answer. It was different for the apostle Paul: he had the 'thorn in the flesh' that he persistently asked God to remove. His request was not accepted. God works in different ways, with no fixed formula, and chooses to do what He deems necessary at any given time. Our attitude to God's response should be as expressed in the hymn: 'Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer' (George Croly).

The disciple's self-view The Pharisee in Luke 18 had a very high moral view of himself. He was proud and preoccupied about his obedience to the Law. The best he got was a feeling of satisfaction while the adjudged 'sinner' was justified. As disciples we must have a proper view of ourselves. Having bought us at such great price, God expects His children to reverence and glorify Him wherever we are, with whatever we have (1 Cor. 6:20). Every disciple—and indeed humankind itself—is unique. It is therefore unwise to compare ourselves with others as the Pharisee did.

Contentment is a virtue and 'godliness with contentment is great gain.' Money in itself is not evil: it is for our enjoyment; but 'the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil ... Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs' (1 Tim. 6:10). The Lord, in the parable of the sower, spoke about 'the deceitfulness of riches'. The disciple should hold earthly possessions with 'light hands', view them as gifts from God and see himself or herself simply as a caretaker. Riches are uncertain and even 'sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle' (Prov. 23:4-5)!

Abraham Elijah, Richard Owotorufa

From Ravulapalem: The blind man at Jericho insisted on calling Jesus 'Son of David' to attract the attention of the Healer in the midst of the noisy crowds (Luke 18:38-39). He was able to hear and good at speaking (Mat. 11:15; 12:34). He got faith by hearing (Rom. 10:17). He might have heard through his parents or from others. Jericho people used to spread good news right from the days of Joshua, as Rahab told the spies that she heard about the power of the mighty God (Josh. 2:11).

From the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:1 and Luke 3:32 one can see the royal origin of Jesus from David. In those days people within and beyond Israel were calling Jesus by this name, 'Son of David', for example the Canaanite woman. Jesus

praised her faith as great (Mat. 15:22). Compare even the scribes described in Mark 12:35.

Paul noted that Jesus was a descendant of David (see Acts 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8) and He is also called 'the Root of David' (Rev. 5:5). Let us also join the crowd in the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and say, 'Hosanna to the son of David! Hosanna in the highest.'

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *Divine response to human needs*

'That power is prayer which soars on high, through Jesus on the throne,
And moves the hand which moves the world, to bring deliverance down'

J.C. Wallace

God's willingness to intervene in human affairs is directly proportional to our ability to persist in prayer [see Comment 7]. The more prayer, coupled often with fastings of various kinds, the more significant the leverage in 'moving the hand that moves the world'.

Great men of God, such as Jacob, Elijah and Daniel, are examples of the efficacy of persistent prayer: 'And he said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"' (Gen. 32:26 NKJV). 'In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three weeks were fulfilled' (Dan. 10:2-3). 'The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit' (James 5:16-18).

'Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart' (Luke 18:1); it is however a grave error to cast God in the mould of the man whose hapless friend came at midnight or of the unrighteous judge besought by the poor widow (Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8). These parables are not depicting similarities in our dealings with God, but rather contrasts. Both the man and judge were not motivated by acts of love or compassion but by self-ease.

It is a delight to God to have His children pray to Him persistently and consistently (cp. Ps. 50:15; 65:2). Yet He does everything according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11) and His own pleasure (John 11:6-7). It is His prerogative to respond to our

prayers when He deems it appropriate (Hab. 2:3). His timing is not necessarily consonant with ours and He owes no obligation to our expectations (Is. 55:8).

Persistent prayer thus strengthens our faith in God's innate goodness and faithfulness: 'It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear' (Is. 65:24). Men of God have persisted in prayers for certain issues but the Lord's position on the matter did not change (2 Cor. 12:8-9; 1 Sam. 16:1). Daniel's prayer was answered the first day he prayed, not based on his persistence; he did not know this then, but was strengthened as he continued (Dan. 10:12). Jacob held on tenaciously to the angel of the Lord because the socket of his hip was out of joint, although it does not detract from his persistence. The blessing came through his clinging (Gen. 32:25).

Frederick F. Ntido

From Warri: *Events in Luke 17* A comparison of the passages in Matthew, Mark and Luke shows the interval between the Lord's coming to the air for His saints and His coming with His saints to establish the millennial kingdom on earth [in support see Comment 5]. An appraisal of the Lord's answer to the disciples' question in Matthew 24:3 indicates two events. One has to do with the imminent destruction of the Jerusalem temple—which gives a first answer to the question 'when'? The other has to do with signs preceding His return and of the end of the age.

Israel will be the focal point during the seven years' tribulation period, described as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7). Persecution from the Antichrist will be so severe that Israel will cry for deliverance (Is. 64:1). Ultimately the Lord will come and deal a blow to this adversary and his cohorts before setting up His kingdom (Rev. 20:1-3). Thankfully present day believers should be concerned but not frightened with the horrors depicted in the signs of the end of the age as we will then be with the Lord in glory.

Jesus, Son of David The accounts in Luke 18:35 and Mark 10:46 of a blind man—Bartimaeus do not contradict Matthew 20:30 where two blind men were recorded. Matthew's account was more detailed whilst Luke and Mark chose to focus on Bartimaeus, one of the two [Comment 11].

The blind man no doubt had heard much about Jesus before the encounter. He believed Jesus to be the Messiah and Lord with power to restore his sight (Luke 4:18). He took his chance when the opportunity came his way. Neither his blind condition nor the rebuke of others deterred him from crying out to the Lord for mercy.

The expression 'Son of David' is a Messianic title of the Lord Jesus that has its root in the Old Testament (Jer. 23:5-6). We noted the Lord's question to the Pharisees; 'what do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?' (Mat. 22:41-42 NIV). The Lord, no doubt, wanted the people to have the right estimate or evaluation of Him. Quoting Psalm 110:1, He asked how David's Son could also be David's Lord. The Jews had the mindset that the Messiah would be a man who would sit on David's throne and bring deliverance to Israel from Roman domination and establish his kingdom on earth. What they could not fathom was the fact that Jesus was not only human, a descendant of David, but the Son of God (Rev. 22:16; Heb. 1:3). This remains a lingering stumbling block for many Jews today.

S. Obarogbi, L. Onyokoko

COMMENTS

1. (Aberkenfig): What cannot be questioned is Moses taking God at His word, acting promptly in the best interests of his own as well as God's people, and fully recognising his 'right' to call on the Lord to consider again His pledge to honour the faith of the patriarchs in the promise of the land He had reserved for their progeny as an inheritance (Ex. 32:13).

R.B.F.

2. (Derby): It is certainly true that technological advances allow the instant communication of events around the world. Many see in this the words of Revelation 1:7 having literal fulfilment in that every person on earth will be caused to see Him at His coming. However, the use of statements such as this to illustrate the magnitude of an event is regularly employed elsewhere in Scripture without the need for a literal reading. Examples include the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt 'in the sight of all the Egyptians' (Num. 33:3 ESV) and the visit of people from 'all nations ... from all the kings of the earth' who came to hear Solomon's wisdom (1 Kin. 4:34). It therefore seems more plausible to me that John was employing a similar literary device to describe the immense significance of His appearing.

J.T.N.

3. (Greenock): The challenge, however, of the Lord's appeal, 'Will he yet find faith on the earth?' will be whether that faith will fully embrace the design and call of God in the New Covenant.

4. (Halifax and others): The kingdom within If Gk. *entos* meant 'in the midst of

you', and referred to the Lord with His disciples, would that not have been an obvious body of people, who could readily be located as they moved around—here or there? The advice would then have no point. Eminent scholars, however—W. Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*, and N. Turner, *Grammar* p.216—prefer the sense 'within', and it was so understood by J. Miller—see B.S. 'The Gospel of Matthew', 1996, p.129.

5. (Ibadan and others): *The coming of the Son of Man* The event described in Luke 17:32f. bears the warning not to go home for valuables, which cannot apply when saints are caught up to the air to meet the Lord. We are told also in the similar passage in Matthew 24 that 'the abomination of desolation' will be set up in the rebuilt temple (24:15). There will be darkening of the sun and moon, and stars will fall from heaven. The Lord's judgement court on earth will then be followed by the unworthy being cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth (25:30). In contrast, the rapture of believers, and the assessment that follows, are a time of rejoicing and reward for all who are caught up, as described in by Paul in his Letters. Although aspects of the coming described by the Lord have lessons for believers today, the Lord's prophecies concerned (1) events within the lifetime of His disciples and (2) those of His coming as Son of Man to earth, addressed especially to Israel and those who recognise her importance to God and take her part—after the rapture of the Church the Body (Cp. Cromer para. 1 and Greenock para. 1).

M.A.

Here we have another instance in the New Testament of 'the word of prophecy made more sure' (2 Pet. 1:19), spoken by the Lord Himself regarding the future. The characteristics of the 'the days of Noah' and 'the days of Lot' (17:26,28) when people went about their normal business having no interest in what God was saying through His servants of impending divine retribution (2 Pet. 2:5,7), will also pertain when the Lord comes to the earth to set up His millennial kingdom. 'In the day that the Son of Man is revealed' (Luke 17:30) differs from the lengthier period of time described as 'in the days of the Son of Man' (v.26) as it is a single day of judgement. As in the case of the two righteous individuals aforementioned, the unrighteous will be removed from earth and taken to judgement ('the flood came and took them all away'—Mat. 24:39) while the righteous Noah and his family were spared to re populate the cleansed earth. Righteous Lot and his two daughters escaped—his wife too, though soon to make a fatal choice—while those in the two cities were swept away to punishment. So, in that coming day of the Son of Man, one shall be 'taken away' from earth to judgement and the other 'left' to live and enjoy the blessings of the millennial kingdom under the perfect rule of God's Son (cp. Mat. 25:34,46; Luke 17:31,34-35).

6. (Ibadan): The Lord is forewarning of the need for those who will believe the gospel of the kingdom that will be preached after the rapture of the church the body of Christ to be on the alert, as many religious imposters will seek to cultivate a following, leading many astray (Mat. 24:11,14).

R.B.F.

7. (Ibadan): In this sense, the power of prayer may be fulfilled, not in the bending of God's will to meet our own, but in the shaping of our will to embrace His with a sense of peace at His benevolent overrule. In his prayers relating to the thorn in his flesh, Paul was led to understand that it would not be removed from him; but not only so—the higher purpose was that he should learn “my grace is sufficient for you”... for when I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Cor. 12:9-10 ESV). See also Surulere, closing paragraph.

J.T.N.

8. (Mount Forest): We agree the Lord would not reply to ‘Where?’ with an answer about ‘When and How’. Does He not mean that the locus can be expected (on earth) to be where the enemy gathers against Israel?

M.A.

9. (Mount Forest): In my understanding, the Lord Jesus' words in Matthew 24:28 and Luke 17:37 are directing attention to the fact that there will be fearful consequences for the unready and unrepentant when He makes His way to reign on earth (Rev. 9:15, 18, 20-21), followed by a summoning of the fowls of heaven to feed on their carcasses (Rev. 19:17-18).

R.B.F.

10. (Okorikpehre): First, it's a pleasure to welcome a fresh group contributing. We note, however, that Jacob was blessed when he was reduced to clinging to the angel, not when he resisted.

11. (Warri): *Two blind men in the same occasion of healing* Mark and Luke may well have focused on Bartimaeus as the more active and vocal of the two mentioned by Matthew. Luke may refer to the new city of Jericho built by Herod the Great under a mile south of the Old Testament site. Matthew and Mark would thus describe the Lord's route southwards through old Jericho and meeting the blind men between there and the new city.

M.A.

OCCUPIED WITH TALENTS AND MINAS

Although the parables of the talents (Mat. 25:14-30) and of the minas (Luke 19:11-27) are similar in many respects, it is clear from their contexts that they were spoken by the Lord on different occasions and to different people.

The context The parable of the minas was delivered in Jericho, as the Lord made His way to Jerusalem. It seems likely He was still in Zacchaeus's house, for the 'they' of Luke 19:11 surely refers to those who had grumbled at His going to be the guest of such a sinner (v.7). It was not until a few days later that the Lord sat with His disciples on the slopes of Olivet and told them of the future 'when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him' (Mat. 25:31 ESV). The parable of the talents formed part of that discourse, an explanation to them of the nature of the kingdom of heaven (25:1,14).

An amount entrusted One of the key differences in the parables is the amount entrusted to each servant. In Matthew 25, the three servants received a differing amount, 'each according to his ability' (v.15). In Luke, the ten servants each received the

same valuable sum, a mina equating to three months' wages for a labourer (Luke 19:13). The command of the nobleman was to 'engage in business until I come' (v.13). This was now their occupation. Relieved of their other duties, the servants were to transact with what had been entrusted to them that their Master might profit from their endeavours.

The talent represents a spiritual endowment. In its application to us, it is often linked to the gifts of the Holy Spirit given for the edification of the Body. In Ephesians 4, Paul explains that not all receive the same gifts, for 'grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift' (Eph. 4:7). In this matter of gift, each of us has received something different from the Master. Perhaps we consider the measure we have received to be less than another's. So be it! The Master has enriched you for your sphere of service, and He calls on you to employ that wealth to His profit until He comes. But there is another sense in which we have all received the same. We each have one life to live in the service of the Lord, and, whether long or short, we are called to live it for Him. So Paul's teaching develops from

gift in Ephesians 4 to walk in Ephesians 5, as all who seek to live for Him are called to 'walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time' and to 'understand what the will of the Lord is' (5:15-17).

Reward and rebuke In each parable, the returning master displays 'the kindness and the severity of God' (Rom. 11:22). For those who used His deposit wisely, faithfulness was answered in responsibility. The unrighteous servant, ignorant as to the will of his lord, met rebuke and loss. He knew the demands of his master; he knew the repercussions of unfaithfulness, and yet he refused to obey the command and returned his deposit unfulfilled. The master's rebuke was just recompense for the servant's

idleness.

The prevailing lesson could hardly be clearer. Each one of us has received an equal opportunity to serve the Lord in our generation, equipped with various gifts bestowed by His grace, and enjoined by the command of the Master. It is our sole opportunity, and account must be given when He returns. Surely, then, we cannot bury what we have, but rather strive in joyful service and hopeful expectation of hearing those wonderful words then spoken to us: 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'

'Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.'
(C. T. Studd)
J.T.N.

From Study Groups

'TODAY SALVATION HAS COME TO THIS HOUSE' (Luke 19)

From Aberdeen: Zacchaeus was a rich man, but a sinner. Nevertheless his encounter with Jesus brought him to repentance. Repentance and faith are seen in his deliberate decision to give half of his goods to the poor and to amply compensate anyone from whom he had taken more than was due. Selfishness and covetousness were repented of because Zacchaeus received Jesus as the Messiah. Zacchaeus's outlook completely changed from the moment that he received Christ as Saviour. Standing in the presence of the Friend of sinners, Zacchaeus resolved to 'give' and to 'restore' (Luke 19:8). It was by faith that he showed himself to be a son of Abraham. His faith is seen in his actions. From this point on, Zacchaeus would endeavour to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Abraham had gone out from his native land in faith, not

knowing where he went, but simply trusting God to lead him and to provide for him (Heb. 11:8).

The Lord will expect each of us to give an account of how we have used whatever gifts have been granted to us. Teachers will give an account of their teaching. Those blessed with riches will give an account of their handling of wealth. Timothy was exhorted, 'Neglect not the gift that is in thee' (1 Tim. 4:14 RV).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: *The city of Jericho* Jericho, destroyed through Joshua (Josh. 6:24-26) and rebuilt by Hiel (1 Kin. 16:34), is described by Josephus *Jewish Wars* 1.6.6 and 4.8.3) as the City of Palms; the Eden of Paradise (its name means 'the Perfumed') [Comment 1]. It sits on one of the busiest trade roads between northern Israel and Egypt, about 12 miles north-east of Jerusalem.

It was an ideal retreat for royal personages, the wealthy and dignitaries. History provides many examples, e.g. Herod and his son Archelaus had built magnificent buildings and gardens. The Romans exacted many tolls for goods to pass through, and Zacchaeus was one of the chief tax collectors who took more than was due, pocketing the difference, and was therefore hated by fellow Jews. He wanted to 'see' Jesus and to say that he was rich is possibly an understatement. Thinking he was obscured by the foliage of the sycamore tree, he must have been shocked to observe Jesus passing that way, and, as He stopped, saying, 'Come down'. Whilst it is not the custom or culture to invite oneself to food and lodging, apparently it was a privilege in those parts of Israel. Zacchaeus received Him joyfully (lit. 'with rejoicing').

Zacchaeus's repentance Precisely when Zacchaeus 'stood up' we are not told: the Greek word translated 'if' (Luke 19:8) implies that the statement is true. He knew the Law regarding paying back fourfold (Ex. 22:1) so he meant 'In every instance in which I have defrauded anyone.' No doubt he had records of those transactions, because without hesitation he promised to make things right. In response to this confession Jesus declared that 'salvation' had come to that house that day, affirming that Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham. Jesus restates His purpose in coming to earth, possibly pointing to Zacchaeus, 'to seek and to save that which was lost' (Luke 19:10).

Unlike the rich young ruler who loved money more than he loved God, Zacchaeus came to an easy decision. Despite his immense wealth, impressive power and sordid past, he cast it all aside to become a follower of Jesus.

The parable of the minas The Lord continues with another parable. His followers (the disciples and the crowd) were expecting Him to be declared king at the impending Passover Feast (v.11). They were quickly reminded of Archelaus (4 B.C.), son of Herod the Great (around 40 B.C.), whose rule over the Jews had been met with such hostility (Josephus, *Antiq.* 14.9.2,14.11.2, and Books 17 and 18): ‘we will not have this man to reign over us’ (Luke 19:14). Before leaving, the nobleman in the parable gave ten servants responsibility to trade (invest) a ‘mina’ (each mina was the equivalent of approximately 100 days’ wages). They did not own the money or have it as a gift, but rather held it on trust. The nobleman was to use the trading as a test of their fitness to rule cities. The ‘citizens’ can be likened to the ruling authorities. ‘We will not have this man to reign over us’ was their attitude. The servants, as his followers, reported back that they had ‘traded’ with varying degrees of success, except for the one whose mindset was such that he called into question his master’s kindness and integrity, basically saying, ‘If I made money you would take it; if I lost money you would punish me; therefore I played it safe so that you can do neither’. His impudence earned him a severe rebuke. He ended up where he began—with nothing [Comment 2].

The Lord has gone back to heaven to receive authority to rule the earth and will return in power. As believers we are entrusted with our ‘mina’—all that we have is from God, and the question is whether we will invest it well, or will we just wrap it up in a napkin?

Bill Paterson

From Belfast: *The Lord’s sorrow for Jerusalem* Being sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (Mat. 15:24), His ministry was to see the chosen people of God repent and return to His Father (Hos. 14). As there was nothing which Christ more ardently desired than to execute the office which the Father had committed to Him, this was a truly moving yet monumental moment for Jesus. Whilst He surveyed the city before Him, He was preparing to fulfil yet another prophecy and to enter the city of Jerusalem. ‘This day’ (Luke 19:42) was so important because it was likely the day prophesied by Daniel—that Messiah the Prince would come unto Jerusalem [Comment 3]. Daniel said that it would be 483 years on the Jewish calendar, from the day of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, to the day the Messiah would come to Jerusalem. By the reckoning of Sir Robert Anderson, this was fulfilled 483 years later to the day (by the Jewish reckoning of 360-day years, as in Daniel 9:25). He wept, for He had a deep desire to deliver His people from the coming destruction, knowing that their complete rejection of Him upon the cruel cross of Calvary was only a few days away. Although the cross loomed before Him, His tears

were solely for the lost sheep of Israel. The end was near and the result was inevitable since He was their only way of escape from the impending judgement.

The name Jerusalem means 'city of peace', but alas it was not so. If they had only known what would bring them peace (Luke 19:42)! Jesus knew that their desire for a political Messiah would bring total destruction in less than a generation. He spoke with special feeling, repeating the name Jerusalem for emphasis and depth (13:34). When God repeats a name, it can be seen as a display of deep emotion and not necessarily anger (10:41; Acts 9:4).

'When the hen sees a beast of prey coming, she makes a noise to assemble her chickens, that she may cover them with her wings from the danger. The Roman eagle is about to fall upon the Jewish state - nothing can prevent this but their conversion to God through Christ. Jesus cries throughout the land, publishing the gospel of reconciliation - they would not assemble, and the Roman eagle came and destroyed them' (Adam Clarke).

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *Zacchaeus the Jew?* 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor' Zacchæus called Jesus 'Lord'—and well he might, for it was no mere man who had effected such a change. This was none other than the sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords, who one day will descend from heaven to the Mount of Olives to rule this world as Prince of Peace. Zacchæus acknowledged the Lord's authority in his heart: this brought about a radical change in his priorities. Spontaneously he displayed true repentance, evidence of the work of God in his life—half of his possessions he gave to the poor and he was ready to return four times as much to anyone he had defrauded. Coming from a tax collector, this was unheard of! Zacchæus's obsession with money disappeared because he had become 'rich in faith'. Material gain lost its hold on him because he had come into a spiritual fortune—'the riches of Christ ye cannot count, His love cannot be told' (*PHSS* 386).

'*Today is salvation come to this house ...*' The Saviour of mankind took up residence in the heart of Zacchæus. This man was 'born from above' (John 3:3 RVM). The change that took place in his heart had its effect on all around him. Wife, servants, friends and business associates—all must have noticed the difference.

'*Forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham*' Zacchaeus received this blessing by faith, not because of his Jewish pedigree, for neither salvation nor spiritual growth are things we inherit. The Lord did not say Zacchaeus was a child of Abraham. His salvation had

nothing to do with his family tree. Jesus said he was a son of Abraham. To be a true son of one's father, we need to follow in our father's footsteps, to reflect the same moral character. This is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said to His disciples: 'Love your enemies ... that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven' (Mat. 5:44-45 RV).

The Scripture says: 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness' (Rom. 4:3). Abraham took God at His word and then he lived the life of faith. Jesus meant that Zacchaeus, like Abraham before him, had exercised faith—had said in his heart, 'I believe the word of God to be true; I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God; I believe He has the power to save me and I put my trust in Him and in Him alone'. Zacchaeus began as he meant to continue—the rest of his life would be lived by faith in God, not by relying on dead works for salvation.

'For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost' (Luke 19:10). Zacchaeus was truly saved that day, praise God! The Good Shepherd had found another of 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Mat. 15:24).

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: *Zacchaeus—the son of Abraham* By natural descent Zacchaeus was a child of Abraham, i.e. a Jew; but he became more than that. Although of the 'chosen people' he was naturally 'lost', and he needed supernatural regeneration. He showed himself to be Abraham-like in that he believed God, just as the passage in Genesis 15:6 tells us, and he received salvation, i.e. righteousness. The passage in Luke does not specifically say that, but Zacchaeus demonstrated his faith by his actions. This is a general truth, as James writes: '... faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead' (James 2:17 ESV). A declared faith which has no outward manifestation is probably spurious.

Using our talents Verses 11 to 27 are paralleled by Matthew 25:14-30. This passage uses the word 'talents' in its original sense of 'currency', but this sense is currently archaic, and it is now primarily understood to mean 'abilities' or 'gifts'. This is what the Lord will expect us to give account of—our use of the things that He has given us, whether abilities or money. We all know some people who 'have everything'—prosperity, eloquence, a comfortable life and the admiration of their peers. We do not know why God gives more to some than to others, but the Lord Himself enunciated the principle, 'Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required and from him to whom they entrusted much they will demand the

more' (Luke 12:48). It would be very wrong of us to be jealous of the well endowed; we have each to take our place and do our part.

The significance of the nobleman Opinion was divided as to whether this passage should be interpreted as an allegory, giving a significance to each individual statement, or a parable, having one overriding lesson. In favour of the former, contemporary parallels were cited, where men went up to Rome to receive an earthly kingdom from the Caesar, and a spiritual meaning was adduced; whereas the going into a far country and returning referred to the Lord's return. On the other hand the behaviour of the nobleman does not seem to be consistent with the character of the Lord. The context of the parable was the propinquity of Jerusalem, and the hope of the immediate establishment of the kingdom of God, but the Lord chose to emphasise individual responsibility rather than His immediate return [Comment 4].

Peter Hickling

From Derby: We considered Abraham's response after the battle in the Vale of Siddim (Gen. 14:23), and the principle of making restitution for taking that which is not one's own (Ex. 22:1). Zacchaeus was willing to follow this principle and restore fourfold: we thought that this is what was required of the sons of Abraham, as the people of God, for Zacchaeus, being a Jew, was of course a descendant of Abraham. A person who had been engaged in wrong dealings and had turned to Christ for salvation would need to restore where possible. Service, even in small things done for the Lord (Mat. 10:42), will receive His blessing: the widow gave her all. The two anointing the Lord were considered, and how these two women gave very generously of what would cost them greatly.

Parable of the minas 'Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval' (Rom. 13:3 ESV). We thought this should be our watchword: to do good. 'Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ' (Col. 3:23-24). In giving one's self to the Lord in service it will soon be evident what our gifts are, but we will still be required to use our faculties in His service, seeking wisdom from above to help us in other areas of service which we will need to do for His Name's sake. His grace is sufficient for us, and as Paul exhorted the Corinthians, 'my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9).

John 15:16 (RV) states, 'Ye did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide.' This is our duty

along with the commission of Matthew 28:18-20. The Pharisees heard the praise given for all the mighty works that had been done; and not only was praise given to God, but to the Lord Jesus as well.

The general mind was that the nobleman did not represent the Lord, but the parable is a message for us in using what has been given us for God's service [see Comment 4].

The Lord enters Jerusalem Young's Literal Translation reads, 'Blessed is he who is coming in the name of Jehovah. We blessed you from the house of Jehovah.' They no doubt knew the words of the Psalm and the fact of the Lord being given such high honour with praise coming from the house or presence of God. They would not accept that He was the sent one, the Word becoming flesh; '(and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth' (John 1:14).

The Lord was deeply grieved concerning Jerusalem in every aspect of it, for it was the place chosen by His Father for the dwelling of the divine being of God. Israel were the chosen nation and the people of God, yet 'he came unto to his own, and they that were his own received him not' (John 1:11). The cross, with all its woe, revealed the consequences of their rejection, their house being left desolate and their hearts far from the things of God. Matthew 6:21 is a word to us—'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'.

G.W. Conway

From Greenock: Jericho, the city of palm trees, has a special significance in the Bible as one of the oldest fortified cities of history. It is located near where the River Jordan enters the Dead Sea, some 825 feet below sea level. Its name may have a link to *Yarikh*, the name of the Canaanite god of the moon, giving context to the first conflict on Israel entering the land as a clear contest of strength between God and a satanic idol [cp. Comment 1].

Condemned for idolatry and resisting the arrival of the Jews it was destroyed and a curse placed upon it (Josh. 6:26). No idle threat, the curse was fulfilled during the rebuilding (1 Kin. 16:34). At the same time as total destruction was meted out on the city, great grace was shown to Rahab and her family. The destroyed city should have been an enduring memorial to the severity of the wrath of Yahweh and the impotence of *Yarikh*. However, once rebuilt there was no condemnation on dwelling there.

Moses had the privilege of viewing Jericho from the heights of Mount Pisgah, 2330 feet above sea level, which is some 200 feet lower than Jerusalem. The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho is about 18 miles and the descent is some 3325 feet in total. Jerusalem enjoys a Mediterranean climate with around 20 inches of rainfall whilst Jericho receives only 8 inches and would be uninhabitable without its spring. This supply of underground water would lead to its downfall.

Excavations by Kenyon (1952-58), Sellin and Watzinger (1907-11) and others, have verified the Bible account of the event where walls slid down into the soil and the section with the house of Rahab was preserved. Critics ridiculed this idea until the middle of the last century. Concrete evidence followed earthquakes in Japan (Niigata) and in Alaska (Valdez) in 1964 where whole buildings sank into liquefied soil, and these phenomena are still an area of scientific research..

Luke records the procession through Jericho *en route* to Jerusalem: this was the last opportunity to meet Jesus. Matthew has two blind men healed as the entourage leaves Jericho; Mark records blind Bartimaeus by name, whilst Luke has a blind beggar sitting on the wayside of the approach to Jericho, whose sight is restored following Jesus and then Zacchaeus in Jericho itself [see May issue, p.60, Comment 11]. Each of these instances records a determination to meet Jesus. Nothing was going to keep back these men. Following in Jesus' train, the men would be part of the celebratory crowd going up to Jerusalem. Praise God for the example of these individuals who were freed from the power of sin and were enabled to make the journey up to the city—in time to see the triumphal entry fulfilling prophecy (Zech. 9:9)! The importance of that event is testified by all four Gospel writers recording it.

The symbolism of 'up' to Zion and 'down' to Jericho is used by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Descent from Yahweh to the city of the moon is reflected in the behaviour of the priest and the Levite departing from the compassion and care they should have shown.

Let us have confidence in the truth of the Bible, since time after time the critics are silenced by irrefutable evidence. Take courage from the inclusion of Rahab for seeking after the God of the Jews. Continue to wait for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. For our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

Steve Henderson

From Halifax: *A son of Abraham* 'This day is salvation come to this house' (Luke 19:9 AV). The Jericho of Old Testament times was known as 'the city of palm trees'

(Deut. 34:3; Judg. 1:16; 3:13; 2 Chr. 28:15). However, to those who love to read of Zacchaeus, Jericho is the place of one special tree—'a sycamore tree' (Luke 19:4) [see Comment 1]. Although both a superintendent among the tax collectors and a Roman official, his name (Gk. *Zakchaios*, meaning 'pure' Thayer, p. 269) indicates that Zacchaeus was a Jewish man (cf. 'Zaccai', Ezra 2:9; Neh. 7:14). When he heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, Zacchaeus quickly resorted to the wayside sycamore-fig, seeking to see Him. It is remarkable that Jesus, being pressed by the crowd, came to that very place and spoke to Zacchaeus by name (Luke 19:5) saying, 'make haste, and come down'. Prof. W.L. Liefeld observes, 'Zacchaeus's desire to see Jesus, though commendable, was surpassed by the fact that Jesus wanted to see him' (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, 1984, p.1007).

The townsfolk thought of Zacchaeus as being a sinful man (v.7) and were therefore critical of Jesus for going in to be his guest. Zacchaeus too was sensitive to the fact of his sinfulness. Nevertheless, greatly changed was the man of little stature (v.3) when he was visited by the Son of Man, who had come 'to seek and to save that which was lost' (v.10). Salvation came that day to the house of Zacchaeus (cf. Ps. 118:15) since he also was 'a son of Abraham' (v.9) and not because he had finally been moved to do a good deed. Abraham was not justified by works; but he 'believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness' (Rom. 4:3). Zacchaeus, the lost, was found!

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): *Zacchaeus, a son of Abraham* Abraham was synonymous with faith: his faith was counted as righteousness to him. Zacchaeus also had faith in Jesus—so much that he wanted to see Jesus by all means (Luke 19:3-4) [Comment 5]. Jesus thus called him a son of Abraham. He was such, not by human birth (see Aberdeen paper) but by the promise of Christ (Rom. 4:1-5,16; Gal. 3:7,15-16,22). Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus, and when he had the opportunity to see Him he displayed his faith in Him by accepting Him with joy (v.6). Zacchaeus was a self sufficient man: he was rich and had not reported sick; therefore he was not seeking Jesus for material or physical things but to confirm his faith in Him. Jesus saw his faith through his effort to see Him. He did not look at his sins, but into his heart (1 Sam. 16:7)—a heart that was thirsting for Christ.

The nobleman: the Lord? The Lord of the servants (i.e. the nobleman) gave money (talents) to his servants to trade with. The Lord is the only one who gives rewarding gifts. We should therefore take note that we will give account for what has been committed into our hands, and not at all be wasteful. In light of this we should use our time (in prayer, Bible study, etc.), our resources and our privileges judiciously.

Believers are the profit of the Lord's work of salvation and He also wants us to profit. Though we would not perish after having been saved, the unprofitable servant who would be cast into outer darkness (Mat. 25:14-30) would have his work consumed with fire though he himself would be saved (1 Cor. 3:12-17) [Comment 6]. The experience is like that of a walking corpse or a living dead. This is a challenge to us. There is danger for those who are saved but refuse to walk in the ways of the Lord. The prodigal son, though received back, had lost the right to his father's inheritance. The nobleman could thus be compared to Jesus. The Lord, though merciful, is also a judge [see Comment 4].

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: Tax collectors in the times of the Gospel writers were notorious. It is said the system of taxation used by the Romans gave the local tax collector authority to levy more than what was due, keeping the surplus for himself (see Edersheim, *Life & Times ...*, Bk. 1, pp. 515-517). In that context it is no surprise that Luke says Zacchaeus was rich. He would be hated too, even though he was influential. We are given little information about his background, though his ancient namesakes may have been the sons of Zaccai, of repute as returning Hebrew exiles (Ezra 2:9). Doubtless he was a Jew, but his fellow Jews may have seen his action in supporting the Romans as almost apostasy. The people certainly saw him as a notable sinner (Luke 19:7). Even the Lord likened 'Gentile' and 'tax collector' as typical descriptors of offenders to be excluded from fellowship (see Mat. 18:17, which helps to indicate Zacchaeus had shown true repentance). It was the Lord Himself who noted he (also) was 'a son of Abraham'. This designation immediately put him generically on the same plane as the crowd around, and them in the same class as he! [Comment 7] But we should note the Lord's further equalizing words that He came to call lost ones like them all, including Zacchaeus of course, and Matthew (another tax collector: Mat. 10:3). They were among those to whom the Son of David was sent (see Mat. 15:22-24).

In Acts 13:26 it is merely the common *genos* (Gk. for family) among the sons of Abraham that is emphasized. But Hebrews 7:5 indicates that genetic equality does not imply equality in every respect. Zacchaeus, by his works, fulfils John 8:39, though there it is 'children' rather than 'sons of Abraham'. In Galatians 3:7 Paul draws a distinction between descendants according to the flesh, and those who are sons because they display the same character as their father (and see Rom. 9:6-8 and Gal. 4:22-23 re. election). Abraham's faith is the noted characteristic.

So if the Lord's description as a son of Abraham was intended to show Zacchaeus' sameness with the crowd in their common need, it was perhaps also intended to emphasize his faith as being special, and evident in his works (James 2:20-23). Regardless as to whether we see his remarks about restitution as evidence of past practice or as an assertion of what he would now repentantly be doing, we should note they were uncharacteristic for a man in his position: he was showing rare humility and charity. He had not used his influence to get an audience with Jesus. Instead he ran ahead and famously climbed into a tree—expressions of keen interest and not human pride. To his house the Lord 'must' go, adding emphasis to the inevitability (see also Mat. 16:21; Luke 13:33; Luke 2:49; 4:43; John 4:4). Only here in the Gospel records does the Lord use the word 'forasmuch' (Gk. *kathoti*) [We owe this accurate word to Luke, who alone of N.T. authors uses it, also in 1:7 and Acts 2:24, 17:31—M.A.], emphasizing that Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham, and salvation has come to his house. By personal faith Zacchaeus could receive the message of salvation, and He who personified salvation was there.

Geoff Hydon

From Ravulapalem: When Jesus looked up at the short man in the tree and told him that He must abide at his house on that day, Zacchaeus came down to accept salvation and received Jesus joyfully. He told the Lord that he would give half of his property to the poor and restore fourfold what he had taken from anybody by false acquisition. He decided to follow Jesus as his new master and leave his old master, money. The important rule in the law of Moses about the trespass offering is full restitution and twenty percent interest for stolen property (Lev. 6:1-7). When a person committed this sin against God, he was to confess and recompense his trespass along with the principal and add to it a fifth part (Num. 5:5-7).

John the Baptist warned the Pharisees not to boast of themselves as children of Abraham (Mat. 3:8-9). God promised the 99 year old Abram to keep His covenant with him and make him the father of nations (Gen. 17:4-5). Abraham believed God and it was accredited to him as righteousness; hence all believers are in this sense children of Abraham (Gal. 3:7). The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the Law but also to those of the faith of Abraham (Rom. 4:16).

Jesus knew Zacchaeus as He knew Nathanael (John 1:48,50; 2:24). With meekness and unhesitating obedience in Jesus, Zacchaeus showed himself a follower of the law of restitution. This leads Jesus to call him 'the son of Abraham' as Abraham was

named the father of believers [Comment 8].

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *A true son of Abraham* Fewer narratives in Scripture are as compelling as that of the diminutive, wealthy, despised tax collector, Zacchaeus, scrambling up a sycamore fig tree, driven by curiosity and perhaps a budding belief, to catch a glimpse of the great Teacher (Luke 19:1-4). Having not much background information on this delightful character, it is refreshing to note his resolve: 'He wanted to see who Jesus was' (v.3 NIV). It is difficult, even impossible for faith to be stirred in the human heart apart from the promptings of Almighty God: 'for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose' (Phil. 2:13).

Closely linked to the foregoing is the desire to see Jesus, although not in a physical sense: 'Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"' (John 20:29). The Greeks who came during the Feast had a passion similar to that of Zacchaeus: 'They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus"' (John 12:21). Appropriately here, the great patriarch Abraham was also gloriously involved, as testified by the Messiah Himself: 'Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad' (John 8:56).

Zacchaeus went beyond merely catching a glimpse of the Lord Jesus—having scaled the impediments of his physique and the disapproving crowd—to acting on the Lord's command for him to come down immediately, for He must stay in his house that day (v.5). Seeing Jesus out of curiosity is not sufficient, if no affirmative step of faith is taken. Many had seen Him and followed Him, yet had abandoned Him because they had not the requisite faith or conviction (John 6:66).

It is in believing in God and following His Son, Jesus Christ, that the similitude of the faith of Abraham is formed. Although Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day, and he saw it and was glad; yet it was the faith of Abraham in that he believed God that was credited to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:3). As such, any who believe in God, whether Jew or Gentile, are the sons of Abraham.

Zacchaeus was a *bona fide* son of Abraham indeed: 'So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly' (v.6). Beyond this seeming rush of excitement, Zacchaeus confirmed his status as a true son of Abraham when he declared further: 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount' (v.8). It is impossible

to have the faith of Abraham, without the accompanying works: 'was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did' (James 2:21-22).

The crowning glory for the vilified tax collector, Zacchaeus, was the Saviour's declaration to him: 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost' (vv.9-10). There is no greater honour for a son of Abraham.

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Aberkenfig): *Jericho, city of palm trees* This title is given three times in Scripture, the first being Deuteronomy 34:3 (cp. Halifax paper, para. 1), and is taken to signify fruitfulness. In contrast, Israel before the Lord had come spiritually to many leaves and little fruit—much show, but little profit. The sycamore-fig that Zacchaeus climbed was the wild fig, offering poor fruit at best. We see the warning for our service in the present phase of the kingdom of God.

M.A.

2. (Aberkenfig): Worse still, he had wasted the opportunity given to him and lost the good favour of his master.

J.T.N.

Luke carefully notes that the parable was given when the Lord's audience, both followers and others, expected the kingdom of God to appear soon. They were taken up with release from oppression and their rightful inheritance, as they thought it, would be restored. The Lord, however, warns that each man would be searched as to his use of God-given opportunity, in spite of hostility towards the king, and doubtless towards those faithful to Him. They were yet to learn that the next phase of the kingdom would be spiritual, not material, and only beyond that dispensation would there be a physical kingdom ruled by the Prince of Peace.

M.A.

3. (Belfast): The end of the 69th week coincides with the anointed one being cut off with nothing (Dan. 9:26), rather than specifically His entry into Jerusalem (which of course had happened many times before this).

4. (Cromer and others): Whilst there is a danger in trying to force all parables into an allegorical straightjacket, it is worth considering the details which are given about the nobleman here. First, he went away in order to receive a kingdom (v.12; cp. John 14:28; Col. 1:13). Then, he gave a promise of his return (v.13; cp. John 14:3). His parting command was that his servants should serve him until his return (v.13; cp. Mat. 28:18-20; 1 Thes. 1:9-10). He was hated by his own citizens who rejected his right of rule over them (v.14; John 19:15). Despite their objection, he received his kingdom, becoming king over those who had rejected him (cp. 1 Cor. 15:25), and called his servants to give him account of what they had done (v.15; Heb. 4:13) for in his hand were both reward and judgment (vv.17,24,27; cp. Rev. 22:12; John 3:35-36). In the light of these parallels, I find it hard to accept that the nobleman was not intended to represent the Lord Himself, and the words which were spoken about him by the unfaithful servant (v.21) were not corroborated, but used by the nobleman to illustrate all the more the servant's false conduct—if that is what he truly thought of his master, than his exertion in service should have been far more exact.

5. (Ibadan, Alawaye): We can only speculate as to the precise moment when Zacchaeus came to faith. Certainly, when he climbed the tree, the Spirit was at work in his heart, convicting him as to sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8) and directing his search towards the Son of Man who had come to seek and to save those who were lost. The turning point seems to be the Lord's address in verse 5, in particular His specific knowledge of this man, which has echoes of the Lord's words to Nathanael in John 1:48 and to the woman at Sychar's well in 4:18. It was only then that Zacchaeus 'received him joyfully'—into his house, but more importantly, I judge, into his heart, for it was only then that he so marvellously changed his ways with regard to his riches and to the victims of his earlier dishonesty.

6. (Ibadan, Alawaye): The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 speaks of the kingdom of heaven and spans the period from the Lord's ascension to heaven until His return to judge the earth as Son of Man. Accordingly, there is no suggestion in Matthew 25:30 that a believer in this day of grace can lose his salvation—that is assured for us, as John 10:28-30 and many other scriptures testify. Yet there will be those in that day of judgment (not members of the Body of Christ, who will already have given account at the judgment seat) who will suffer eternal loss as their record of service is brought into question. How grateful we should be that this is a prospect we shall never face!

J.T.N.

7. (Mount Forest): The declaration by the Lord that Zacchaeus was a 'son of Abraham' related not to his natural descent as an Israelite, but to the fact that he had come to repentance and believing faith in the Son of God (see first paragraph of Aberdeen's paper) *R.B.F.*

8. (Ravulapalem): The law of the trespass offering, requiring twenty percent interest, is far surpassed by the four hundred per cent commitment by Zacchaeus (cp. Ex. 22:1) but we agree that the offer of restitution is a proof of saving faith. It cannot be proof though of his being a (not 'the') son of Abraham as Abraham is not associated with law. *P.D.*

PARANOID PROTAGONISTS: CHIEF PRIESTS, SCRIBES AND ELDERS

Time and again the unholy triumvirate of chief priests, scribes and elders sought to outfox and outwit the Lord Jesus by clever words and specious arguments, even to the extent of ending up making a complete fool of themselves, as we see in the opening narrative of our study. The Lord indicated to the disciples early on that the three groups would do everything within their power to silence Him and ultimately would be responsible for securing His death sentence (Luke 20:1- 8; Mat. 16:21).

They had the collective authority to summon armed militia, and with the betrayer at the forefront, apprehend the Lord in the garden of Gethsemane. He was taken during the night hours to the Sanhedrin chamber in Jerusalem to be examined by the high priest Caiaphas, where they were already assembled, having set up a kangaroo

court with false witnesses whose evidence was contradictory. In the breaking of dawn, another concocted court session was convened; the outcome being the Lord was now brought before Pilate the Roman procurator, who under pressure from the same men, sought to rid himself of responsibility by sending Him on to Herod. At the crucifixion scene, they led the voices of cruel mockery, having the sheer effrontery to quote the words of Psalm 22 to the Man of Calvary, the Son of God (Mark 14:43,53; Luke 22:66 – 23:7; Mat. 27:41,43).

They never gave up, but neither did the Lord Jesus. Nothing and no one could divert or thwart Him from the pathway of suffering obedience that in the end would lead to endless glory (cf. 1 Pet. 1:11).

R.B.F.

From Study Groups

‘TEACHER, YOU HAVE SPOKEN WELL’ (Luke 20)

From Aberdeen: If the chief priests, scribes and elders had been willing to accept that the baptism of John was divinely authorised they would have concluded that the authority of Jesus was also from heaven—because John’s ministry pointed out how the one coming after was greater than himself. Indeed Jesus was the pre-eminent prophet whom Moses had foretold (Deut. 18:15). The Jewish leaders were wilfully blind to Jesus as the Messiah; hence there was no need for Him to enter into a contest with such opponents.

Jesus shows how the ministry of John the Baptist was bound up with His own ministry. God’s way was to prepare the way of the Lord by sending John beforehand (Luke 3:4). Preparation is characteristic of how God proceeds in His work. We see His preparatory work in sending Joseph to Egypt ahead of the famine years. We see how David spent years in the wilderness before gaining the throne of Israel. Saul of Tarsus spent three years in Arabia before returning to Damascus after being properly equipped for the Lord’s work (Gal. 1:17-18). There is orderliness in God’s ways: the sufferings of Christ take place before the glories that follow (1 Pet. 1:11). In the matter of resurrection Christ is the firstfruits, followed by those who are Christ’s (1 Cor. 15:23). When Christ returns for His church the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:16-17).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: *The authority of the Son* It would appear that as the passage in Luke 20 unfolds, the Lord Jesus did not answer the Pharisees’ question directly at first, for He was giving them an opportunity to use their intellect and learning to come to an understanding of who He was. However, later He did in fact show that His authority came directly from the Father who had sent Him, with the parable as His illustration.

He asks them whether the baptism that John presented to them came from heaven or from men. Their obvious discomfort in arriving at an answer is clearly seen in their discussion together, as they realised the difficult position they had been put into. If they acknowledged the heaven-sent role of John and his baptism, they stood condemned for rejecting it for themselves. However, their fear of the people led them

to refrain from saying 'From men', as John was held to be a prophet of the highest calibre. No! They could only decide that they didn't know the answer to the question rather than expose their rebellion and unbelief.

The Son and the vineyard Building on this, Jesus proceeds to the parable of the vineyard. He highlights the vineyard tenants' rejection of the father's son, thus allowing them the opportunity to reach the point of understanding that His claim of Sonship was not only legitimate and true, but it also required them to believe Him and His words. That they got the message is quite clear from their reaction in verse 19, which comes hard on the heels of the quotation from Psalm 118, indicating that even though the stone (i.e. Jesus Himself) was rejected by the builders (the Pharisees), it would nevertheless become the 'head of the corner' through the will of the Father and His purposes in the Son.

Paul writes about this in Romans 9:31-32: 'Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness, did not succeed in reaching that law'. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone' (ESV). The lack of faith that these men displayed reveals how deeply entrenched they were in the legalistic ways of their interpretation of the Law, something that was to their lasting shame, as they 'killed the Author of Life' (Acts 3:15). Peter also uses Psalm 118 to show that those who exercise faith in the Lord Jesus do so to their eternal honour—'So the honour is for you who believe' (1 Pet. 2:7). How gracious God is, as He rewards our feeble faith with such a glorious blessing!

Edwin Stanley

From Belfast: *'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'* A cornerstone, literally 'head of the corner', is a large stone used to align the corner of two walls. The cornerstone is the first stone laid as part of the foundation, and all other stones or bricks will be laid in reference to this stone, determining the position of the entire structure. In the parable of the tenants we clearly see that the perspective of Israel (the tenants), and God,(the owner), are of opposing views with their positioning and reference points remaining unaligned with God throughout. They had not listened to the prophets, the servants of the parable. However, God shows His forbearance by sending them repeated warnings that they are out of line with His purposes until He, God, decides to send them His Son, the heir. In God's view this stone, disdained by the world, has become the most important stone in the structure of the new order that God is bringing about through Israel.

‘Now He is the bond of the building, holding Jew and Gentile in firm unity. This precious corner stone binds God and man together in wondrous amity, for He is both in one. He joins earth and heaven together, for he participates in each. He joins time and eternity together, for He was a man of few years, and yet He is the Ancient of Days. Wondrous cornerstone!’ (Spurgeon) [Comment 1].

In comparison to the other stones, the cornerstone would not be a grand, sparkling jewel—nothing to attract us to it visually. We live by faith, however, and not by sight, so with the correct perspective (1 Cor. 2:10) we will appreciate its beauty, wonder at its security and be humbled by its testing (Is. 28:16). The religious leaders were blinded to this since they were living by sight and not by faith. Being quick to refute their responsibility, they thought of the parable as ‘This could never be us!’ They didn’t approve of His origin (John 7:52) and they didn’t approve of His lack of formal education (John 7:15). They didn’t approve of His disregard for man-made religious traditions (Luke 6:2) and they didn’t approve of His choice of friends (Mat. 9:11).

It was true of Jacob, Joseph and David—each was rejected, but then raised high. It is also most certainly true of Jesus.

‘Still do the builders refuse Him: even to this day the professional teachers of the gospel are far too apt to fly to any and every new philosophy sooner than maintain the simple gospel, which is the essence of Christ: nevertheless, He holds His true position amongst His people, and the foolish builders shall see to their utter confusion that His truth shall be exalted over all’ (Spurgeon).

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *‘The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner’* (Ps. 118:22 RV; Luke 20:17). The parable of the vineyard and the analogy of the stone rejected becoming head of the corner, have one and the same meaning.

In the parable of the vineyard, the owner sent his servants to receive its fruit. Unfortunately, those given charge of the vineyard rejected the authority of the owner and seized it for themselves. When the owner sent his beloved son, instead of respecting his right to receive fruit on behalf of his father, the husbandmen murdered the rightful heir.

The parable is a perfect illustration of the treatment God received from Israel who, as the ‘planting of the LORD’ (Is. 61:3) and His separated people, ought to have produced the fruit of righteousness, i.e. worship and service motivated by heartfelt gratitude and appreciation of His grace towards them as former slaves. Instead they

went after the gods of the nations, and not only turned deaf ears to the prophets whom God sent to plead with them to return to Him from their evil ways, but treated them shamefully (Jeremiah, Isaiah, Elijah, *et al.*). Contained within the parable is the foretelling of the death of the Lord Jesus, the only begotten, beloved Son of God, who ‘came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not’ (John 1:11). Without doubt, the chief priests, scribes and elders got the message, for when faced with the prospect of God’s vineyard being taken away from them, they exclaimed ‘God forbid!’ [literally ‘Be it not so’—*Eds.*]. It is in reply to their shocked disbelief—that God might remove their privileged status as the people of God—that the Lord drives home the point that, although they as builders of God’s kingdom had rejected Him, nevertheless He was destined to become the ‘chief corner stone’ of God’s kingdom. (Cp. 1 Pet. 2:6-7.)

There are important lessons here for us. The Lord said to His disciples, ‘Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom’ (Luke 12:32); and to the Jews He said, ‘The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof’ (Mat. 21:43). Firstly, it is clear that the thing which the Jews feared became reality: their constitution as a holy nation was taken away when the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom, when Israel crucified their Messiah. The temple was subsequently destroyed and the ‘little flock’—the disciples who became obedient under the new covenant—became God’s holy nation instead (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Secondly, it is also clear that the principle that God seeks fruit from His ‘tilled land’ applies just as much to those in His spiritual house as it applied to those who served in tabernacle and temple. Golden lamp stands can be removed if God does not receive from them the fruits of obedience in worship and service, which are His due.

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: Throughout chapter 20, Jesus is addressing those who sought to lead the people of God, maintaining God’s will and the Mosaic law. They did not accept the authority of Jesus and looked to find ways to discredit both Him and all that He taught. The parable of the vineyard takes us back to Isaiah 5, where the prophet writes of Israel being the vineyard of God.

In the parable Jesus speaks of the servants who were sent to the vineyard to obtain some of the crop. What did they find? Was the crop substandard? They were ill treated and sent away empty-handed. This must have been reminiscent to them of the way in which God’s servants of the past—His prophets—were sent away when

they attempted to take God's messages to the people. When Amos was to set a plumb line against the people of Israel, Amaziah sent Amos away (Amos 7:12-13). After the death of Jehoiada, Joash turned away from the Lord to idols, and when the Lord sent the prophet Zechariah (Jehoiada's son) to condemn his actions, Joash had Zechariah stoned to death (2 Chr. 24:21).

In the same way that the leaders of the past had refused to accept the servants, the chief priests, teachers of the law and elders made a wrong judgement against Jesus' claims. Were they rejecting the Son who had been sent by God? Jesus quoted from the Psalm about the rejection of the stone which was going to become the foundation stone of God's people. Since many of the people had accepted the teaching of Jesus, the leaders were afraid to take any action; but as the chapter goes on they still sought ways to find fault with Him.

We are living in a world which constantly tries to discredit scriptural teaching, but we must hold fast to the truths that have been handed down to us.

David Hickling

From Derby: In this chapter we see how the Pharisees were trying to get the Lord to say that He was the Christ, so that they could then accuse Him of blasphemy. By virtue of their learning of the Law, these people should have been able to understand that the Lord Jesus was not operating independently. Possibly some of them had heard His discourse (noted in John 5) when He declared that those who honour the Father also honour the Son. By this He was declaring the authority with which He spoke.

The vineyard obviously relates to the nation of Israel, as Adam Clarke points out in his commentary:

'A man—the Supreme Being. The vineyard—the Jewish nation. The husbandmen—the priests and doctors of the law. Went from home—entrusted the cultivation of the vineyard to the priests, etc., with the utmost confidence; as a man would do who had the most trusty servants and was obliged to absent himself from home for a certain time.

He sent a slave—Prophets, which from time to time He sent to the Jewish nation to call both priests and people back to the purity of His holy religion.

Give him some of the produce—Alluding to the ancient custom of paying the rent of a farm in kind; that is, by a part of the produce of the farm.

Beat one—*deirantes*, took his skin off, flayed him: probably alluding to some who had been excessively scourged.

Wounded and cast out another, etc.—Rid themselves of the true witnesses of God by a variety of persecutions.

Last of all he sent—his beloved son—This requires no comment. Our Lord plainly means Himself.

He will come and destroy these vine-growers—So, according to this evangelist, our Lord caused them to pass that sentence of destruction upon themselves, which was literally executed about forty years after.'

Perceiving this to be spoken against them, the chief priests and scribes tried to lay hands on Him, but because of the people they dared not do anything to him.

The questioning preceding verse 25 was designed as an entrapment for the Lord. So far as they were concerned they had cornered the Lord. See how the Lord's wisdom opposes their malice: He asks, 'Whose head is on the coin?'—to which they reply, 'Caesar's'. The Lord now comes out with His wise reply, for which they have no answer. But, what actually is Caesar's? It is three things: 1. Honour. 2. Obedience. 3. Tribute. These things are all part of society running smoothly. If, however, Caesar should intrude into the things of God by introducing a new gospel, then he is not to be obeyed.

In verses 41 to 44 the error of the scribes was in not recognising that the Lord was the Messiah. This passage was acknowledged by all to refer to the Christ. In using this, the Lord confounded them all. Indeed, after this the Lord did not experience any more malicious questioning. The rulers were now bent on doing their utmost to plot how they would kill Him.

Laurence Foster

From Greenock: Jesus said to the religious leaders, '*Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's*' (v.25 NIV). There is always a dividing line between the sacred and the secular. He also said in a parable, 'Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it' (Mat. 7:13-14). There is no crossing over from one road to the other unless sinners on the broad road repent of their sins, turn completely around, and come to the small gate and enter through the Lord Jesus who is 'the door' (John 10:7), and in humility and contrition for past sins accept Jesus as Saviour, to walk the narrow road with Him to eternal life. A sinner once saved cannot cross over from the narrow road to the broad road, because never do the two ways meet except at the cross, and between them is a great gulf fixed. Unrepentant sinners do not see the need to change their lives to accept Jesus as Saviour, but continue blindly on the broad road to eternal destruction.

Jesus' words, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's' is a corollary of 2 Corinthians 6:14-16: 'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.' There is the same dichotomy between the sacred and the secular throughout the Scriptures and between the lives of believers and unbelievers, as in 1 Corinthians 15:50: 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God', and 2:14, 'The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.'

'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's' exemplifies how vastly superior Jesus' teaching was to that of the religious leaders of His day. The most brilliant minds could not entrap Him with their clever questions. It is one of life's delights to listen to a good teacher, or to a good story-teller. What words of divine grace and heavenly wisdom, words of love and truth which are the essence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God in three Persons, blessed Trinity, which have come down to us in the Holy Scriptures. The word of God lives and abides forever (Is. 40:8). Will the Lord teach His bride, His wife, from His eternal word when we are with Him in heaven?

John Peddie

From Halifax: *His only son* Two days after the Lord's public entrance into Jerusalem (see Mark 11), He returned to teach in the temple. As He 'preached the gospel' (Luke 20:1) the chief priests and scribes with the elders 'came upon him' (RV)—they suddenly appeared and they stood up against Him. 'Tell us,' they said, 'by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?' (v.2). In answer, Jesus asked them about the baptism of John (v.4). Was it from heaven or of men? Finding themselves in a dilemma, their response was to admit they could not say (v.7; cp. Mat. 21:27; Mark 11:33). Jesus then presented the parable. Having narrated the sending of a servant, a second servant and a third, Jesus related how the husbandmen cast out the beloved son and killed him (v.15). Mark adds (12:6) that the lord of the vineyard had but 'one son, his well beloved'. This parable so clearly reminds us of the only begotten Son of God, who being sent was delivered

up for us all (see John 3:16-17; Rom. 8:3,32; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:9,14). Jesus said, 'He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which sent him' (John 5:23b).

A penny The same hour, the chief priest and scribes sought to lay their hands on Jesus (Luke 20:19). They sent spies who sought to ambush Jesus in His teaching. These asked Him about paying tribute to Caesar. Jesus, however, 'perceived their craftiness' (v.23), or as R. F. Weymouth translates, 'But He saw through their knavery' (*The New Testament in Modern Speech*, Fifth ed., 1929). The Saviour required of them the sight of 'a penny' ('a *denarius*', ESV) and, pointing out the likeness and inscription on the coin, He said, 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's' (v. 25). This answer was so marvellous to them that they were silenced in their shame.

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): *Answering the Pharisees' question* The Pharisees already knew the answer to the question. They had seen the power of God manifested by Him but did not want to acknowledge it. Therefore Jesus responded according to the thoughts of their heart, which were not hidden from Him (John 2:25).

The parable of the vineyard Jesus is represented here as the only son of the man who planted the vineyard. The Pharisees, scribes and the elders had been given the Law. They were the master builders. They knew Jesus' parents and siblings, and because of this mocked and rejected Him. The prophets had earlier been sent to them, but they were likewise scourged and rejected.

The son (Jesus Christ) was sent and he was killed, his death being planned by these same people. Jesus, however, is the chief cornerstone through whom all could approach the Father [see Comment 1]. Without Him none can be saved. He is the author and captain of our salvation (see Heb. 2:10). No other foundation can be laid (1 Cor. 3:11; Is. 28:16). The Pharisees knew He was talking about them (Mark 12:12) but they refused to acknowledge it. Yet whether they accepted or not, He remains the chief cornerstone.

We should therefore appreciate the foundation on which we are built, along with all that we are and have through Him (Eph. 2:18-20). This should also teach us as believers always to listen to others no matter how old we may seem to be in the faith. We should not look down on others like the Pharisees did.

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: *The Lord's response in Luke 20:8* was completely reasonable. He was indeed answering their question, not merely avoiding it. It was a common practice among Jewish teachers to ask a question as a proper response to a question. That somewhat catechetical like practice is perhaps reflected in the comment in Luke 2:46-47. The idea in this method is that by successfully answering the second question, the answer to the first would become evident too (or that the wrong basis for the initial question will be clarified).

For the group questioning the Lord the problem was that they were fixed in their unbelief of John the Baptist's message. This is apparent from verse 5. But it was John who had testified to Jesus being the Christ, the Son of God (John 1:34), and of His power and glory, and His ability to baptize in the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:7; Mat. 3:11), and therefore the need to believe in Him (Acts 19:4). John fulfilled the prophetic expectation by calling for Israel to prepare the way for none other than 'The Lord'. John also told of the Christ who 'takes away' (Gk. *airo*) the sin of the world (John 1:29). That has obvious application in subsequent revelation to the sacrifice of Christ (1 Pet. 2:24, but using a different Greek word: *anaphero*) the expression can be seen in the context of Matthew 3:12 (RV) as also a depiction of the Son of Man who would 'thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor' in His judgment. The general context of John's pronouncement is indeed not one that emphasizes the meek and gentle Lamb of Isaiah 53, but the pure and powerful Lamb who has the right and ability to judge, as also predicted by Isaiah, and Malachi (Is. 40; Mal. 3:1), which John quoted. For instance, the same Greek word John used in relation to the Lamb taking away sin was used by the Lord in relation to the kingdom of God being 'taken away' from Israel (Mat. 21:43), and sinners taken away in the judgment of the flood (Mat. 24:39).

But the combined leaders of Israel (Luke 20:1), not just the Pharisees, all refused to accept that Jesus was either the Christ in all His power, or the sacrificial lamb in all His meekness. In fact, to truly believe the latter it is necessary to accept the former. Thus, in pointing to their error in refusing John's testimony, the Lord was clearly answering them as to the source of His authority, for if they believed John their question was immediately answered.

Interestingly, to John the evangelist who recorded the Baptist's testimony to the Lamb, was also given the apocalyptic vision of the Lamb as both sacrificed (Rev. 5:6) and triumphant (17:14).

It is interesting too to see how Luke goes on later in this chapter again to record questions being used by the Lord to establish His authority (Luke 20:41-44).

Geoff Hydon

From Okorikpehre: *The Lord's refusal to answer the Pharisees' question* This is one of the many instances when the Jewish leaders looked to fault the Lord. It was a kind of catch-22 question, where either answer was intended to implicate Him. The Lord seemed cornered, and His authority for teaching was questioned: 'Tell us by what authority you are doing these things' (Luke 20:2 NIV). He proved the wiser in every case. In this instance, He did not answer the question as expected, partly because He knew that the motive behind it was to trap Him. In any case, He had told them at other times who He was, but they refused to believe Him. Luke tells us that they 'rejected God's purpose for themselves' (7:30). The Lord claimed to be equal with God in His works—raising the dead, carrying out judgments and sharing the same honour with the Father (John 5:19,21-23). He had had so much interaction with them as to the revealing of who He was.

Instead of answering their questions, the Lord put a poser to them that proved difficult to wriggle from. In most cases, as in this, the Lord used the tactic of answering questions with questions to silence His opponents (Mat. 15:1-3; Mark 10:2-3; Luke 6:1-3; John 18:33-34).

Psalm 118:22 and the parable of the vineyard Locally, in early days, when he was first given an opportunity to preach the gospel from the platform, an overseer tells how he erroneously interpreted Psalm 118:22 by asking rhetorically, 'What does a builder do with a building block that is not good?' His answer was, 'You discard it, or you throw it away!' Thankfully, the second speaker did the damage control. We reminded ourselves of the importance of study to correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). The Psalm fittingly speaks of our Lord in His rejection and triumph. He is portrayed in the parable as the son sent by the owner of the vineyard, after his first, second and third emissaries were disregarded and shamefully treated. He was not only rejected but killed. The good news is that the Lord is indeed alive, and shall return, having received the power to judge and to reward (John 5:22; Rev. 22:12).

'Stone' in the context (v.17) is the Lord Jesus Christ, and 'the builders' were the Jewish religious leaders (elders, priests, scribes, Pharisees) of the day. This is clear from Peter's reference to them: 'He is "the Stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone' (Acts 4:11) [Comment 2]. He makes reference to this in his epistle: 'Now to you who believe, this stone is precious' (1 Pet. 2:7). Those who refuse to obey, to accept his message or to surrender to His rule as exemplified in the parable, are the losers at the end of the day (Luke 20:16,18).

Abraham Elijah; Lawrence Onyokoko

From Ravulapalem: When the chief priests and scribes tried to question His authority, Jesus replied with a question about John the Baptist to which they could not reply, and told them that therefore He too would not tell by what authority He was doing those things.

He told the parable of the tenants and concluded that the owner of the vineyard would kill them and give it to others. The people said, 'May this never be!' He reminded them that the stone, rejected by the builders, became the head of the corner; whoever fell upon it would be broken, and on whomsoever it should fall it would grind him to powder. When asked about taxes, Jesus instructed them to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. They were astonished by His answer and became silent.

Regarding resurrection and marriage, the Lord clarified that those resurrected will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die, for they are like the angels. He also stated that God is the God of the living, for all live unto Him in soul and spirit (1 Pet. 3:4). On hearing all these things there was no other response from the scribes except their saying 'Teacher, you have spoken well' (20:39). No one dared to ask Him any more questions.

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *Why did the Lord refuse to answer the Pharisees' question?*

A hallmark of divinity is its forbearance in the face of manifest provocation: 'For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls' (Heb. 12:3 NKJV). It is ever the inclination of mortal men, particularly the religious set, to rail against and query that which is beyond their ken. And of such, no doubt the Almighty God had in mind as He took Job to task: 'Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you and you shall answer Me' (Job 38:2-3). God puts His creatures to the question, if He chooses. The chief priests, scribes and elders in their self conceit and arrogance presumed to have the right to interrogate the Lord and were hopeful of a response (Luke 20:2).

Although 'Our God is in heaven, He does whatever He pleases' (Ps. 115:3) and 'whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the sea and in all the deep places' (135:6), yet He enjoins all: 'Come now and let us reason together, says the LORD' (Is. 1:18). The Lord is ever so gracious that in the plenitude of His powers He does not look down on the children of men: 'Behold, God is mighty, but despises no one; He is mighty in strength of understanding' (Job 36:5).

However, the Lord Jesus would not dignify the query of the religious leaders with a response primarily because they were an evil, scheming lot: 'And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him and were unable to do anything: for all the people were very attentive to hear Him' (Luke 19:47-48). As the wise man Solomon noted: 'Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD' (Prov.16:5) and 'Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar' (Ps. 138:6). The religious leaders had been treated to a lavish outpouring of the Lord's teachings and powers. They had witnessed first-hand His miracles. They had seen the 'ignorant' poor have the good news proclaimed to them, which they received with boundless joy (Mat. 11:5), yet they dared to ask Him by what authority He acted. Sadly these men were always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). They shut their hearts and eyes to the relentless truth personified in Christ, tokens of His deity, and sought instead an answer as to the source of His authority.

The Lord Jesus is ever willing to enlighten those who genuinely seek to know more about Him and His Father: 'If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority' (John 7:17). In John 5:19-23, the Lord Jesus elected to speak more extensively on His mission and authority. There He perhaps judged the threat less sinister, or in His omniscience was certain of the end result of His discourse which, as always, is the salvation of souls and bringing men to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

Frederick F. Ntido

From Warri: *Response to authority developed* He said to them, 'Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.' This is one of the most misconstrued texts in Scripture down the ages. It is common to hear from people who are not heirs of the kingdom, or who have not tasted of the gift of God's salvation, say that the Lord's words above allow the leading of a double standard life by complying with whatever the world demands, whether or not it contradicts God's words. At the same time they try to offer themselves for the worship of God without making amends for and forsaking past wrong living. They say one can feed both from the table of God and from that of Satan (or the world) side by side. In ignorance these people who, according to 2 Peter 3:16, are unstable, unsteady and ignorant, attempt to distort the Scriptures to their own destruction. It is a grave thing so to try to twist the word of God. Surely it is safe to wait on the Lord for an understanding of the Scriptures.

Commenting on the Lord's statement in verse 25 of our text of study the following were noted:

1. Statement on the obligations and responsibilities of believers to the government of the day.
2. Teaching the need for believers in Jesus to know that being obedient to God includes being good and responsible citizens.
3. It was agreed that the Lord's authority is supreme. In situations where the government's decree contradicts the written word of God, it should be natural for the believer to set aside such a decree and uphold God's dictum. He has the power to kill the body and put the soul in hell, but the government can only kill the body in worst scenarios (Luke 12:5).

The Lord reminded us of Proverbs 24:21, paraphrased as 'Fear the LORD and the king (government of the day) and you must not make friends or associate with anyone who rebels against either of them (God or government)'. Two apostles of the Lord, namely Paul and Peter, helped to develop further this subject in the New Testament. Firstly, in Romans 13:1-7, Paul continued the discussion. These verses teach the responsibilities of the believer to the government. Whether this includes exercising his franchise or suffrage (the way citizens fulfil those conditions that make them eligible as voters) is an issue for another study.

Summaries of Paul's teachings here state:

1. It is the Lord's command to the believer to obey rules set by the government/constitution (v.1).
2. The believer is to see governmental authority as ordained by God (vv.1-5).
3. The believer is only expected to do that which is good (vv.3-4);
4. Our being subject should be more than mere avoidance of embarrassment from government officials (eye-service) but importantly for spiritual reasons ('because of conscience' (v.5 NIV).
5. The believer is expected to pay taxes and revenues and other such demands as stipulated by the constitution. Verse 7 seems to summarise the whole discussion from the previous verses by saying, 'Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour'.

We noted that the Lord does not want us to do all these as a result of the consequences of resistance or neglect, but rather through obedience from our heart as unto the Lord (Rom. 13:5; Col. 3:23). If governments fail to utilize the resources generated from taxes and revenues collection, as proposed by Romans 13:6, that should not encourage the believer to evade tax and revenue payments. The

mentioning of this in Paul's letter to Titus further buttresses the importance of this subject to God, and of course to us as well. This time the apostle said, 'Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good' (Titus 3:1)—man's tendency to forget necessitates the need for constant reminder.

Finally, in Peter's first epistle he emphasizes that the reason the believer should do all that is commanded by these teachings is reverence for the Lord. Of course, 'without Him we can do nothing' (John 15:5). 'For in him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). 'For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him' (Phil. 2:13 NLT). If God's purpose is for us to obey authorities as we continue in His service, it will be our joy so to do. We are cautioned in Jude v. 8, not to speak ill of dominions and authorities: 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them' (John 13:17 NKJV).

Shadrack Obarogbi

COMMENTS

1. (Belfast and others): The truth that lies behind the position of the Lord Jesus as chief / head corner stone of Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16 is further developed in the New Testament in the apostles' teaching. It has to do with the Lord in His high priestly role in relation to believers serving God together as living stones in churches of God, which compositely form the house of God. The principal exercise in this function is that of offering up spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving to His God and Father as a holy priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5-6; cp. Eph. 2:20-22). This is altogether different from the Lord's exalted status as head of the church which is His body, comprising all believers who share the glorious privilege of membership of that dignified entity (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23).

R.B.F.

In support of the above, we note from Matthew 16:18 that the church which is His body is built on the rock (Gr. *petra*, denoting a bedrock in the earth capable of providing a sure foundation). It has long been understood that the Lord was referring here to Himself. Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 10:4, where he uses *petra* to describe the rock from which the Israelites drank in the wilderness, 'and the Rock was Christ' (ESV). He is 'a stone of stumbling, and a rock (*petra*) of offence' (Rom. 9:33) to unbelievers, and yet to believers He the sole foundation on which we build lives able to withstand the storm (Mat. 7:24; 1 Cor. 3:11).

The cornerstone is something quite different. It is a stone taken from the earth to be hewn, tested and (if found faultless) laid at the corner of a foundation to support the building and give the structure its line. The references to the cornerstone in the parable of the vineyard, and by Peter before the council (Acts 4:11), were both to demonstrate that the rejection of the Lord Jesus by the leaders of Israel would not frustrate God's purpose to establish a kingdom comprised of Jews and Gentiles built together to form a spiritual house for God. In both Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-10 where this truth is expounded, central to the teaching is that those who had been no people were now the people of God. Why? Because they had been built together into the structure which forms the spiritual house for God in this age, upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, who took their lead from Christ Jesus, the chief corner stone. As stated above, this work of building took place as men and women were added to churches of God, constituted according to the teaching of the apostles, which were in aggregate to form the spiritual house for the worship of God in this dispensation.

2. (Okorikpehre): It is worth mentioning that the NIV rendering 'capstone' is not warranted by the Greek word *gonia*, meaning corner. The word is used by Paul in Acts 26:26, where the meaning of something hidden can hardly justify the thought of elevation. Similarly with the cornerstone—the thought is solely that of a foundation stone, not something raised high.

J.T.N.

Question . . .

What is the difference between the anointing with the Holy Spirit by God (Acts 10:38, 2 Cor. 1:21-22, 1 John 2:27) and the baptism in the Holy Spirit by the Lord (Mat. 3:11, 1 Cor. 12:13)?

L. Onyokoko, Warri

. . . and Answer

Beginning with **the Father's anointing of the Son** for service here, as in Luke 4:18, and Acts 4:27; 10:38, we understand this as appointment to service for God in ministry to men, including equipping with the Spirit's power in the spiritual sphere while on earth.

From this we are helped to see **the believer's anointing, at salvation**, in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, as similar identifying and equipping for spiritual service in the kingdom of God. (This of course, to take effect, needs to be followed by commitment to entering the kingdom, and serving according the instructions of God and Christ: cp. Rev. 11:15.)

Paul is thus appealing to the Corinthian saints to recognise that, as the gospel was preached among them with clarity and single-minded purpose, and that the apostles and their companions acted out their sincerity in word and deed while with them, so they should rest confidently in the directives and up-building of the apostles' teaching, and apply themselves to every part of it relevant to their service in the church(es). Their anointing was to encourage them with knowing they belonged to God as His servants, and would be fully equipped by the divine Enabler for His calling.

In 1 John the apostle is similarly showing that in the face of the deceits of the antichrist and his followers who had left the church, but would still be active in the surrounding community, the faithful saints should rest confident in the anointing of that day when they were sealed by the Spirit, the abiding power of life eternal (v.25), and understanding of the teaching (v.27), with Him indwelling as a pledge of blessings to come.

M.A.

The anointing, in the first of the three bracketed scriptures quoted, is simply speaking of God the Father giving the Holy Spirit as a divine companion to the Lord Jesus in His service to the Father on earth, while the following two show His indwelling of the believer, enabling us to know and appreciate divine realities, and engage in service which is well-pleasing to God, which is on-going through life.

The 'baptism' associated with John's ministry was a willingness on the part of those who were convicted by his message of their sin and need for repentance to be submerged in water. Whether they understood at that time John's testimony of the Lord Jesus later 'baptising' in the Holy Spirit we do not know. At the moment of faith-belief in the gospel of Christ, every believer, in the context of the last verse cited, is 'immersed' into full membership of the church the body of Christ, and thus again, fitted for service as indicated by M.A. above.

R.B.F.

OUR LORD'S COMING AGAIN AND THE TRIBULATION

There are clear differences between the 'coming of the Lord' of 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, and the 'coming of the Son of man' of Luke 21 and Matthew 24, that is between 'our gathering together unto him' (1 Thes. 2:1 RV) and the time when 'they shall gather together his elect' (Mat. 24:31).

1. The dead in Christ rise (1 Thes. 4; 1 Cor. 15); that they do so is a prominent feature of both passages. There is no mention of the dead being raised at all in the Luke and Matthew passages

2. Those who have 'fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him' (1 Thes. 4:14), reunited with bodies raised but now changed to be incorruptible and immortal (1 Cor. 15:52-53). Again, such glorious truths are absent from the 'coming of the Son of man'.

3. 'All the tribes of the earth shall ... see the Son of man coming' according to Matthew 24, but the coming of the Lord is for those who believe or believed while alive that Jesus died and rose again (1 Thes. 4:14) and not for 'all the tribes'.

4. Believers rise to 'meet the Lord in the air' in 1 Thes 4:17, 'caught up in the clouds'. Nobody rises in Matthew or Luke; rather they see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven'.

5. That there is mention of 'tribes' and 'the holy place' and 'Judea' and 'Jerusalem' and 'Daniel the prophet' and 'the elect' in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 puts it very much in a Jewish context and not in a church context.

6. There are widespread reactions of mourning to the coming of the Son of Man (Mat. 24:30) as well as hope (Luke 21:28), but the promise of the coming of the Lord and the coming itself is for 'comforting one another' (1 Thes. 4:18) and victory (1 Cor. 15:54,57).

From these contrasts and other factors, such as the Jewish context of so much of Revelation 6-18 and the absence of any mention of the Church or churches there, we believe that the coming of the Lord will have taken place before the great tribulation which comes immediately before the coming of the Son of man (Mat. 24:29-30).

P.D.

From Study Groups

‘THEN THEY WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN’ (Luke 21)

From Aberdeen: Certain things in the Lord’s discourse in Luke 21 clearly relate to the days connected with A.D. 70 when many Jews were led captive into all the nations. This historic occurrence was a remarkable fulfilment of prophecy (v.24). Some specifics, however, of the Lord’s prophetic discourse apparently have a double fulfilment. For instance, in the days just before the Son of Man shall be seen ‘coming in a cloud with power and great glory’ (v.27 RV) Jerusalem will yet again be encompassed with armies (v.20). Even now the status of Jerusalem remains unsettled in the eyes of the international community and will continue to be ‘trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled’.

The nations of earth have yet to witness the future events of Luke 21:25 concerning the ‘signs in sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows’. Such distress will take place after the Church, the Body of Christ has been taken away from this earth.

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: According to custom, Jewish rabbis (or teachers) sat down to teach, and history tells us that there were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests (*shopharoths*) set in the colonnades of the Court of Women for the collection of the free-will offerings of temple worshippers. As Jesus sat observing the rich giving of their superfluity (gold and silver coins), their body language betraying their ‘generosity’, His eyes alighted on a solitary figure. Her dress and demeanour showed that she was a poor widow; but into the chests she cast her entire living—two mites (*minas*, *perutahs* or *leptas* are alternative words) which equal a farthing. This was the minimum, laid down by the law in Deuteronomy.

The Lord’s comment was not to disparage a large offering, but to honour those who had but a small amount to give. The widow gave of her want; it hurt, but it was total commitment; and this is what the Lord requires of us. It is not the portion but the proportion; the value is in what is left. The lesson for us is clear: after all God owns it anyway and we have it ‘on loan’ from Him.

The city of Jerusalem was a simmering cauldron of political unrest at this time, with the Sadducees placating the Romans; whereas at the other end of the tug of war were the Pharisees who somehow kept the masses in check—ideal timing for false messiahs to arise, with the expectation of leading a revolution of gullible followers. It was against this backdrop that Jesus foretold that the Temple would be destroyed, despite the huge size and weight of the stones used in its building. This He had already alluded to a short time before (Luke 19:43-44) and according to Josephus the very foundations were dug up so any coming to the area would not imagine that it had ever been inhabited (Josephus, *War of the Jews* 7.1.1.[3]).

Messiahs will continue to emerge from nowhere and chaos associated with the domination of evil will increase. Disasters will continue to intensify until God says ‘enough’ and the true Messiah returns to the earth to reign in power as is His right (Dan. 7:13; Rev. 1:7).

Bill Paterson

From Belfast: *Believers enduring the tribulation?* Another name for this period of time is Jacob’s (Israel’s) trouble (Jer. 30:7). The ‘tribulation’ is when God goes back to dealing with His people Israel. For since the times of the Gentiles began, He has hardened the hearts of His people Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles will come in (Rom. 11:25). This all happened when the Jewish people rejected Christ. They were temporarily cut off from the blessings of a relationship with God, and as a result the gospel was taken to the Gentiles. This partial hardening of Israel’s heart prevents the nation, but not individuals, from accepting Christ as Messiah until His plans are finished [Comment 1]. The final book of the Pentateuch, which is speaking to the house of Israel, makes reference to the tribulation ‘when in distress ... in the latter days ... they will return and obey’ (Deut. 4:30). Repetition is a means used in God’s word to emphasise certain aspects; so the very fact that all four Gospels make reference to this time of tribulation for the Israelite nation should make us sit up and take notice. Jesus was a Jew speaking to the Jews about what would happen to the Jews in the tribulation.

So there are distinct dispensations that have unfolded over time. Jesus came primarily to the lost sheep of Israel (Mat. 15:24) and during His ministry His disciples were sent to the nation of Israel with strict instructions not to go to the Gentiles (Mat. 10:5-6). At the appointed time the gospel was taken to the Gentiles (John 10:16) and this time-period would end at the rapture of the Church (1 Thes. 4)—a pre-tribulation rapture. The reading of 2 Thes. 2:3 also appears to suggest that the man of sin will be

revealed just before the rapture of the church. (Please comment.) [See *Question & Answer—Eds.*]

During the tribulation period, after the rapture, the gospel of the kingdom (Mat. 24:14) is brought primarily to the nation of Israel through the two witnesses, who could be Moses and Elijah [Comment 2]. The Church the Body of Christ having been raptured would then pass before the judgement seat of Christ in heaven (2 Cor. 5:10), while the tribulation happens on earth during Daniel's seventieth week. The Church is resurrected at the rapture and the individuals will be repaid (rewarded) for their service to God on earth (Luke 14:14; Rom. 14:10) [Comment 3]. When the Lord returns at the end of the tribulation He has His bride with Him, who has already been arrayed in fine linen—righteous acts done in service to God (Rev. 19:8) which will have been revealed by fire (1 Cor. 3:13). This emphasises the importance of teaching nothing but the pure word of God with sincere, unflinching obedience.

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *Which generation?* 'Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished' (Luke 21:32 RV). The Lord is speaking to a generation who were so far away from God in their hearts that they refused to recognise Him as Messiah; instead they rejected Him and had Him put to death. That generation was characterised by scornful pride: they maintained a form of godliness but had 'denied the power thereof' in their hearts. These characteristics were seen especially in Israel's leaders, who held the reins of spiritual, intellectual and political power.

When the Lord said 'this generation shall not pass away', He meant that the characteristics which blighted the lives of God's people then will be seen in the generation present on earth when He returns as Son of Man. As Paul foretells, 'men shall be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof' (2 Tim. 3:2-5). The catalogue of vices listed in that passage are readily observable in the present generation of mankind. These and other signs indicate that we are living in the last days of this world's history, and signal the imminence of the Lord's return, first to the air for His saints and later to the Mount of Olives to reign as King of kings.

Between the ascent of the Lord Jesus to heaven from the Mount of Olives and His return to earth as Son of Man is the era of the Church the Body, churches of God and the building of a spiritual house for God. When He returns to the air for the Church which is His Body (1 Thes. 4) there will be no born-again believers left on earth, no

churches of God and no spiritual house of God remaining. The focus of God's purposes will again become centred on His ancient people Israel and the words of Jeremiah and Zechariah will be fulfilled: 'the LORD hath a controversy with the nations' (Jer. 25:31); 'And I will bring the third part (of Israel) through the fire' (Zech. 13:9). During 'the great tribulation' (Rev. 7:14), 'the time of Jacob's trouble' (Jer. 30:7), God will 'refine' His people until their proud, fiercely independent hearts are so softened that they will cry out in desperation: 'Save now, we beseech thee ... Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD' (Ps. 118:25; Mat. 23:37-39).

In that moment of extreme crisis, the Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven on a white horse, and the prophetic words of Revelation chapter 19 will be fulfilled. A nation will be born in a day (Is. 66:8). 'Born again', because 'they shall look unto me whom they have pierced' (Zech. 12:10). Like Joseph's brothers, for the first time they will collectively acknowledge their sin in rejecting their Messiah. Then will be fulfilled Ezekiel 11:19: 'I will give them one heart'.

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: *How does God value what we give?* It is clear from what the Lord said about the offering of the poor widow that it is not the size of the gift which counts with God, but the sacrifice being made by the person offering the gift. The rich gave much but the widow gave all that she had. This was sacrificial giving indeed!

God is the supreme example of giving: His gift to mankind was the Lord Jesus—His one and only Son who came to die for us and who willingly offered himself to God (Heb. 9:14). He loved the Church and gave himself up for her (Eph. 5:25). Well might Paul say, 'Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift' (2 Cor. 9:15 NIV). In writing to the saints in Corinth Paul encouraged them to give to the needs of fellow-saints, reminding them of what the Lord Jesus had sacrificed for them. He says, 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich' (2 Cor. 8:9).

Giving ourselves Paul says of the saints in the Macedonian churches, 'They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to us in keeping with God's will' (2 Cor. 8:5). In view of what God has done for us in Christ we should first offer ourselves. This principle is seen again in Paul's letter to the Romans: 'Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship' (Rom. 12:1). If we first give ourselves, then giving anything after that will become easy.

Scripture guidance about giving: The family Our giving should not be at the expense of our family's needs. Scripture teaches that 'if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever' (1Tim. 5:8).

Regular giving It is important to set aside amounts on a weekly basis appropriate to one's income (1 Cor. 16:2). Hence the collection box is available for this purpose at every church of God.

Giving to others in need Scripture teaches that we should do good to all men, and especially to the household of the saints (Gal. 6:10). These acts of kindness include monetary gifts; and though we should not forget worthy charities, we should not forget that fellow-saints have priority. The Lord Jesus said, 'Freely you have received, freely give' (Mat. 10:8). In light of God's generosity to us we should be generous, too.

Our attitude Scripture says, 'Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor. 9:7). God loves to give; let us also take delight in giving. The Lord Jesus said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

John Parker

From Derby: *How does God value what we give?* What matters is our willingness to give, no matter the cost. As the example of the widow indicates, she gave her all even though it was not much in monetary value. There are other things to give to the Lord such as our time. The aim of our lives should be to give ourselves to the extent that at the end the Lord will say to each of us, 'Well done good and faithful servant.'

How far should we try to identify the signs of the last days (vv.8, 28)? As far as identifying the last days are concerned, we know that Paul states that these will be terrible times, and what we see today are shadows of what is to come (2 Tim. 3:2-5).

We must, however, not allow these things to take over our lives as there is still work to do for the Master and this is to take priority over worrying about what is to come. In Matthew 6:34 we are urged not to worry about tomorrow, but trust that our needs shall be supplied each day. Perhaps the main thing we need to watch for is persecution of Christians in places where once we took it for granted they would be safe.

Will believers be required to endure the tribulation (vv.34-36)? ‘This generation’ could indicate that it is the race of the Jews, who will remain as a distinct people until the prophecy of the last days have been completed. When the Lord comes to reign for a thousand years, the Jews will no longer be a distinct people for all will be following the Lord [Comment 4]. Those who believe in Jesus will be taken up into heaven when the Lord comes to the air. Then there will be the tribulation, after which the Lord will come to the earth in power and glory. Believers in this day and age will not go through the tribulation as we shall be changed and taken up to meet Him in the air. The apostle Paul picks up on the hope that is set before us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 before commenting on the destruction that will come upon others in 5:1-3.

Robert Foster

From Greenock: *How does God value what we give?* We need to take note that there is nothing we have, or are, that was not given to us by God in the first place. ‘Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee’ (Jer. 1:5 AV). We can look at our giving under the headings of money, time, knowledge and possessions.

Money is the one highlighted in the passage. It is so easy, as we pass a charity-collector at the supermarket exit, to take the small change we have just been given and put it in the box. We may well feel a warm glow from doing some good, but it has not cost us much. The Old Testament standard was the tithe—10%. (That sounds great compared to tax levels in the western world today!) In addition, support of the widow and fatherless was important and was over and above the 10%. Then the range of offerings required under the Law for various circumstances and the free-will offering were a further addition. Giving must be done willingly and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7). Jesus made it clear that we are obligated to be generous to those in need (Mat. 25:31-46).

Time We all have 24 hours each day. ‘I’ve run out of time’ is a common complaint. We need to set aside time for God in our schedule before the ‘tyranny of the immediate’ takes up our time. However, once we have ‘spent’ our allocated time for the necessary business of today and an opportunity arises to spend time in spiritual service, we cannot duck out of our obligations. The disciples wanted to send the crowd away at the end of a busy day: Jesus wanted to feed them (Mat. 14:15-21)! Paul repeatedly describes himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:1). A slave has no choice but to serve his master regardless of the time of day.

Knowledge As they went to the Temple Peter and John met the lame man. They gave time by stopping with him. Then they gave of their knowledge (Acts 3:5-6). It can be very tiring explaining the work of the Lord Jesus, but it is what we are called to do (Rom. 10:14-15). Paul clearly felt constrained to do this (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3). ‘You shall be my witnesses’ was the final command given to the disciples before Jesus returned to heaven (Acts 1:8).

Possessions

‘Naught that I have mine own I call,
I’ll hold it for the Giver,
My heart, my strength, my life, my all
Are His, and His forever.’

J.G. Small

‘But whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?’ (1 John 3:17 RV). Jesus tells His disciples the story of a man asking his neighbour at midnight for bread for a traveller just arrived (Luke 11:5-10). His request is answered. He commands us to ‘give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you’ (Mat. 5:42 NIV).

Nothing has changed in the Lord’s expectation of our role. Rather than give a certain amount as an obligation, we are urged to share generously of whatever time, talents, abilities and wealth God has entrusted to us.

Steve Henderson

From Halifax: Noble stones While in the Temple, Jesus sat opposite the treasury (Mark 12:41) and observed a widow throw in two small coins. ‘Of a truth’, He said, ‘this poor widow hath cast in more than they all ... she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had’ (Luke 21:3-4 KJV). When He went out of the temple, one of His disciples pointed out its ‘noble stones’ (v.5 ESV) and said: ‘Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!’ (Mark 13:1). Jesus responded by prophesying the temple’s destruction—‘there shall not be left one stone upon another’ (Luke 21:6; cp. 19:44). Later, when Jesus ‘sat upon the Mount of Olives over against the temple’ Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mark 13:3) asked Him privately, ‘when shall these things be?’ (v.4).

This generation A multiplicity of interpretations has been proposed for the expression ‘this generation’ (Gk. *he genea haute*) found in Luke 21:32, and a wrong conclusion

sometimes drawn that Jesus thought the *parousia* would occur within His hearers' lifetime. Jesus pointed His disciples to two horizons: the destruction of the temple (v.6) and the coming of the Son of Man (v.27). Thus, F. W. Farrar says that 'of each it was true that the then existing *genea*, first in its literal sense of 'generation', then in its wider sense of 'race' should not pass away until all had been fulfilled' (*Life of Christ, 1885*, p. 364). With a different approach, John Miller quotes Isaiah 60:21 and speaks of Israel's righteousness once their days of mourning are over. Meanwhile an evil and adulterous generation shall continue until the coming of the Son of Man. Therefore, he argues, 'this generation' means 'this kind of generation, not the generation living at the time' ('Jottings', *Needed Truth, 1963*, p.162) [Comment 5].

'And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory' (Luke 21:27).

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): *Valuing our gifts* The Lord Jesus appreciated what they all brought to the Temple treasuries—both rich people and the poor widow, and it was all accepted. The only difference was that the poor widow brought all that she had. She undoubtedly denied herself many things: God appreciates whatever we bring, but He appreciates much more the position we are in when bringing it (2 Cor. 8:12). In giving our time, resources, possessions, etc., to the Lord it should not be the ones remaining that we would give or dedicate to Him. We should bring according to what we have purposed in our heart. If our faith could not bring like that of the poor widow, we should, however, not bring remnants. The Lord knows each heart. He was not angry with Ananias and Sapphira because they did not bring all, but because of the motive behind their action (Acts 5:1-4). Nobody should be seen as poor when it comes to giving to the Lord. We should therefore not put ourselves under any control whether there is plenty or lack (2 Cor. 6:12). Our anxiousness should not stop us from serving or giving to God (Mat. 6:31-34).

Identifying last day signs We shall continue to watch until the appearance of the Lord. The signs have been since the era of the apostles, but become increasingly evident as the days go on, and yet nobody knows when His coming will be. It is not revealed even to the angels. It is, however, not about the signs, but our attention is being drawn to the fact that the end is near. We should therefore watch the way we live. We should also be on guard so as not to be swayed by false alarms (Luke 21:8).

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: *Which generation (v.32)?* One approach to answering this question is to refer back to the original enquiry in verse 7, which related to signs of the impending destruction of the Temple, though in Matthew 24:3 the question extends to ‘the end of the age’.

The people surrounding Him at the time of His statements might well have subsequently also witnessed the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and have seen events which to them would reflect Matthew 24:15. To the extent that was their experience, it would seem correct enough to say their generation was referenced in verse 32. However, verses 11, 25 and 35 describe global issues, and verse 24 also indicates continuing Gentile oppression that has even now not yet been completed. So there are problems in applying ‘this generation’ only to those who witnessed the A.D. 70 destruction and surrounding events.

Prior to 1947, it would have seemed most unlikely that Jews would again control Jerusalem. But now, even the rebuilding of a temple does not seem beyond practical possibilities. Could the Lord in fact be referring to a yet future series of stupendous events, which necessitate such a building once again to be destroyed? Or is A.D. 70 just an already fulfilled part of the whole prophecy? Certainly, our understanding of the use of the term ‘Son of Man’ in this passage requires a yet future full application [Comment 6].

Some Bible students having this view—that the passage is describing what precedes the coming of the Son of Man to reign on earth (not just the preceding phase of His coming as Lord to the air)—say ‘this generation’ means those who will be alive at the future time the Lord is describing, not those who just initially heard His prophetic words. The problem with this explanation is that the obvious immediacy of frequent references to ‘you’ and ‘your’ seems stretched if they were intended by the Lord to have primary application only to people living in the then distant future.

In an earlier passage (Luke 9:27; see also Mark. 9:1 and Mat. 16:28), the Lord also refers to some who stood by Him who would not ‘taste death’ until they likewise saw ‘the kingdom of God’. This difficulty may be resolved either by suggesting that on the Mount of Transfiguration this was indeed fulfilled, or that tasting death has to be understood in terms of being hurt by the second death of Revelation 2:11 and 21:8, and that those who rejected Him will indeed yet see Him coming in glory (Phil. 2:10-11) and then ‘taste’ the real ‘death’ their rejection deserves [Comment 7].

Bringing these difficulties together, we are perhaps safest to simply propose that the

Lord's objective was to speak of the certainty of the events and their sequence, rather than provide a precise timing, as the latter is governed by Matthew 24:36. He therefore had to use statements of prophetic warning effective for those who initially heard His words, just as much as for every other subsequent generation. [Cp. Buckhaven paper, para. 2—Eds.]
Geoff Hydon

From Okorikpehre: *Identifying the signs of the last days* It is helpful to read the 'Olivet discourse' in context, or else we will flounder in our interpretation. We took the 'signs of the last days' to be primarily, though not exclusively, about Jerusalem, the Jews, and the Temple. With the Lord on the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mark 13:3) asked three important questions that relate to:

1. the destruction of the then temple (Luke 21:6);
2. the signs of the Lord's coming (v.7); and
3. the sign of the end of the age (Mat. 24:3).

We took the second and third questions to be virtually the same. (The 'end of the age' need not be seen as the end of the world.)

These Jewish disciples were not thinking of the Messiah's coming to take them to heaven but of His coming to defeat their Roman oppressors and set up His longed for kingdom on earth (Luke 24:21). The signs of the last days (21:8,28), or signs of the end time, are signs that will ultimately mark the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as Son of Man to earth during the closing moments of the tribulation period. The Lord started His talk about events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem, but then turned their gaze to events between His two advents. There seems to be a partial fulfilment before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and a later and final fulfilment before His coming to earth.

The current wars, earthquakes, famine, pestilence in our world ought not to be taken as the signs of the end time as they have always been in every age (Luke 21:8-11). These signs, important as they seem, are not pointers to the imminent return of the Lord to the air (the 'rapture'): that may take place at any time without prior signs (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thes. 4:16-17). The signs of the last days should therefore be identified within the context of the great tribulation period. Instead of looking for signs, as were the Jews (1 Cor. 1:22; 1 Thes. 5:1-5), believers should be on the alert, with ears to the ground, listening for the trumpet sound, and looking for the Saviour's arrival [Comment 8].

Richard Owotorufa, Lawrence Onyokoko

From Ravulapalem: *The generation spoken to?* Generation means people or nation at some certain period or a lifespan. God told Abraham that in the fourth generation people would return to the Promised Land (Gen. 15:16). That is the period of Levi, Kohath, Amram and Moses (1 Chr. 6:1-3; Ex. 12:40; Gal. 3:17).

But Jesus told the generation present in His time that it was ‘adulterous and sinful’ (Mark 8:38), ‘faithless’ (9:19), ‘perverse’ (Luke 9:41) and ‘evil’ (11:29). Peter challenged the people to be saved from this ‘perverse generation’ (Acts 2:40 NKJV). Paul described this same generation as ‘crooked’ in Philippians 2:14-16 (RV).

The note about this generation in verse 32 is best taken to refer to the people who are alive when these events begin to unfold at the second coming, not to the generation living in the disciples’ day to whom Jesus was speaking [cp. Mount Forest paper, and Buckhaven, para. 2—*Eds.*]. When the signs should come they would proceed quickly and would not drag on for generations. It would happen within one generation [see Comments 7 and 8].

Only after their conversion, baptism and being added to the Lord, i.e. taking their place among disciples in already established churches of God, did Peter refer to these people as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9).

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *How does God value what we give?* Very few subjects, perhaps, are as misunderstood as that of giving and the value God places on it. It is a grave error to presume that God is enriched by our giving or that He requires it, in the first instance, for His own gratification: ‘If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all its fullness’ (Ps. 50:12 NKJV). God is all sufficient, the El Shaddai: ‘The earth is the LORD’s and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein, for He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters’ (Ps. 24:1-2). He is a giving God in all imaginable respects, and He displayed the depth of His giving when He gave His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, for us (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32; Tit. 2:14; 2 Cor. 9:15).

God, in His giving, is always motivated by love, and He desires this quality in all who give to Him—whether to the poor or for the expansion of the kingdom of God: ‘And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing’ (1 Cor. 13:3). He desires also an acknowledgement of the fact that we are merely stewards of what we possess, to be given freely as He directs: ‘But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be

able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of your own we have given You' (1 Chr. 29:14; 1 Cor. 4:7). The Lord Jesus declared that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35).

As the Son of Man watched the people giving, He observed the rich giving their gifts from the abundance of their possessions, and no doubt in an ostentatious manner. The poor widow gave, however, from her deep poverty. Whilst the rich were perhaps motivated by a mixture of duty and self-advertisement, the widow was constrained by her genuine love for God. The intrinsic value that the Lord places on our giving is determined by the condition of our heart: 'For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we should receive the gift and the fellowship of ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God' (2 Cor. 8:3-5).

The essence of Christian giving is not to receive an equal reward from God; as if that were our motivation. It should be rather an act of sacrificial love, in the spirit of our Lord's giving. Of a truth, it is Scripture that enjoins us to give as we may be prospered and that one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, whilst he who sows bountifully would reap bountifully (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:6). We should remember also that God always looks at the heart and blesses accordingly (1 Sam. 16:7).

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Belfast): We underline your point that this hardening is confirmation of Israel's already formed attitude, not something initiated by God. Compare the same sequence of responsibility in the case of the Pharaoh who refused to let Israel leave his land: he hardened his heart, and then God did so in confirmation after fresh appeals (e.g. Ex. 7:13; 8:15; 10:20).

M.A.

2. (Belfast): The gospel of the kingdom, differing from the gospel of grace today, will require not only the belief of faith in the coming Prince and Saviour, but also an 'enduring to the end' (Mat. 24:13-14), that is, not surrendering to the fearsome pressures of that coming time, even from family members. This will include ultimately, having persistence of faith not to bow to the image of the beast, and refusal to take its mark upon the right hand or forehead (Rev. 13:15-18; 14). This

gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole earth, principally by the 144,000 Israelites, out of the twelve tribes, especially assigned with this responsibility (Rev. 7:4-8; 14:1-5). The two immensely powerful witnesses of Revelation 11:4-12 could well be Enoch and Elijah, who were both transported bodily to heaven by God without experiencing physical death. On the other hand, they may be identified as you suggest, as they were representative of the Law and the Prophets and were summoned by the Lord Jesus to take their place alongside him pre-Calvary.

R.B.F.

3. (Belfast): *The resurrection of the just of Luke 14:14* would be more commonly understood to take place at the return of the Lord as Son of Man to earth to reign. The term 'the just' suits godly Old Covenant saints, rather than sinners saved by grace after Pentecost.

M.A.

4. (Derby): Israel will undoubtedly retain her identity and regain her place of supremacy as God's chosen nation in the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. She will exert a major influence on peoples of every other race on earth (see Deut. 26:18; 28:1, 10,13; Zech. 8:22-23).

R.B.F.

5. (Halifax): Another view on this is that the Lord is indeed speaking of the generation alive at this time, who would see the fulfilment of God's purposes pertinent to the time period in which certain events of which the Lord spoke would take place, e.g. the destruction of the Temple by the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70 (vv.6,20).

6. (Mount Forest): It is not without the realm of possibility that there could be the demolition of a future temple, yet the language of Ezekiel 41-47 regarding the millennial temple would give the impression of an edifice of indestructibility.

7. (Mount Forest): It is exceedingly difficult to introduce the idea of the 'second death', i.e. eternal punishment, into Luke 9:27. Surely the Lord's meaning can only be that some of His hearers would experience in their lifetime the wonder and power of the Lord's presence on earth, resulting in His atoning death, thereafter bringing about the reconstitution of the kingdom of God (cp. Mat. 21:43).

8. (Okorikpehre): These are important points raised by our contributors in this paper. Too often, the view is taken that the signs the Lord spoke about in verses

10-11 of our study chapter are clear indications of the Lord's coming to the air. They are not; they have to do with His coming as Son of Man to the earth to execute judgement on the living nations (see Mat. 24:3-34 for confirmation of this).

R.B.F.

Though we agree the strongest signs of the coming of the Lord to reign on earth are yet to be seen, and no direct sign is given us of the coming of the Lord to the air, it is wise to observe the increasing frequency of natural disasters and wars, since the Lord encouraged us to be expectant and alert, so as to use the present time most profitably for the kingdom.

M.A.

Question . . .

From Belfast: 2 Thessalonians 2:3 appears to suggest that the man of sin will be revealed just before the rapture of the church. (Please comment.)

. . . and Answer

Our understanding is that the man of sin will not be revealed just before the Rapture, but that he will be revealed after the Rapture, during the tribulation. In verse 4 the man of sin is identified in terms which associate him with the 'abomination of desolation' of Matthew 24 and Mark 13, and of Daniel 9, 11 and 12. From Matthew 24:15,21 we see that this 'abomination' is a feature of the Great tribulation. When does that happen?

We know it must be happening just before the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew 24:29-30 record 'but immediately after the tribulation ... the sun shall be darkened, and the moon

shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven ... and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn and they shall see the Son of man coming...' (RV). Note too there how visible and obvious to all this coming is and the reaction of mourning in response to it. We suggest it is impossible to reconcile these events with the mystery (1 Cor. 15:51) of our being gathered to Him (2 Thes. 2:1) and being comforted thereby (1 Thes. 4:18.). The gathering of the Church the Body of Christ unto Him, clearly distinct from the gathering of the Jewish elect of Matthew 24, must have taken place on a previous occasion before the tribulation, for there is no

reference in Scripture to the Church when it is dealing with substantial tribulation doctrine.

Paul may appear to link the Rapture (2 Thes. 2:1) with the tribulation and subsequent events, including the revelation of the man of sin (vv.3-4). But we must remember that Paul is reminding his readers of known teaching just sufficient to steady them, not setting out the full doctrine of the second coming.

P.D.

In agreement with views expressed by our fellow-editor, it may be worth

pointing out that 2 Thessalonians 2:1 refers directly to the 'day of Christ' (Phil. 1:10) when the Lord Jesus comes for His saints who have lived in the dispensation of grace, and whose service for Him is now ended, whereas the 'day of the Lord' (2 Thes. 2:2) is one of judgement. The presence of the Church which is Christ's Body on earth, and the Holy Spirit's residence in every believer, prevents the appearance of the man of sin meantime (2:6-7). See also Buckhaven paper and *BS* Vol. 69, 2002, pp.61-62.

R.B.F.

Question . . .

From Okorikpehre: If the first half of the rule of the antichrist takes about three and half years, we wondered what the 'shortening of the days' (Mat. 24:22) is all about?

. . . and Answer

We thank friends here also for their question.

The shortening seems more linked to the second three and a half years, the great tribulation. There will be an unparalleled persecution of believers then but there will be those who come out of 'great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev.

7:14 RV). But such will be the severity of the persecution during this time when 'he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved' that none will thus endure and 'come out of great tribulation' if the time of tribulation is not confined to the three and a half years. There will be those for whom individually the days are shortened through martyrdom but the prime reference in Matthew 24:22 seems to

be those who endure through loss of livelihood, torture and maiming affecting not only themselves but their loved ones.

P.D.

As said above, there will be increasing intensity of persecution in the latter half of the seven-year period,

known as the 'great tribulation'. Satan will be operating at full speed aware that he is working against time—see the last sentence of Revelation 12:12 for the impact of his movements and feelings. The Lord's mercy is extended to His own by putting a time restriction on Satan's activity.

R.B.F.

PHOTOS FROM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (Luke 22)

We pause our chapter to view some pictures from the scenes before. When the Light of the world brightened the shadows in the last week before His passion, He left some insights that are justly famous. Who else would have noticed the woman who came, poor and alone, to the Temple? But He taught us that the little she cast into the treasury outshone the giving of the rich. We look upon our paltry stores with fresh vision of their potential when given altogether to God.

Then the Watcher of men told us how it will be when tribulation comes upon His people. ‘When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads . . .’ (21:28 ESV): well the Burden bearer knew that the backs of the faithful would be bent in sorrow and weariness. But as a cloud veiled Him at his going, on a cloud He shall come again, to fill their eyes, in power and great glory.

Now as Judas and his employers made their sordid plot, the Light depicted to His own a man carrying a pitcher of water: the character of all His servants who bear the cleansing,

refreshing Word through this polluted world. So Peter and John found the guest room ready for His last night before Satan tried to quench the sunshine of His loving face. The authorities thought there would be an end to His good deeds when He was ‘lifted up’: they had no conception of how even in the later agonies of the cross He would purify the thoughts and warm the heart of a dying sinner, with a view of Paradise beside his best ever companion.

Next the Watcher set the alarm clock for Peter: no other cock has reached such fame. So we pass on to the olive terraces on the hill—the garden was an orchard. It was the last lesson in discipleship, that we watch and pray: vividly illustrated in leading men who slept for sorrow, while their Master poured out His soul. There the powers of darkness came searching with a ridiculous number of guards, betraying their shame to Pilate as they asked for protection. But they could not bear the Light and fell to the ground before Him: their power could not corrupt Him.

M.A.

From Study Groups

‘THIS IS YOUR HOUR AND THE POWER OF DARKNESS’ (Luke 22)

From Aberdeen: The chief priests and scribes were looking for an opportunity to kill Jesus. Their level of hatred was such that they were ready to grasp the moment presented by Judas Iscariot, even though their initial plan was to avoid taking action during the Passover (Mat. 26:5). But the confluence of men’s evil purpose met with God’s appointed time for Christ, the Lamb of God, to be sacrificed. The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God meant that the crucifixion took place at God’s precise time (Acts 2:23). The chief priests and scribes, together with Judas Iscariot and Satan, moved against the Holy One within the permissive will of God. Jesus said to those who came to seize Him, ‘This is your hour and the power of darkness.’ The Lord had taught daily in the Temple, yet His haters had not taken Him (Luke 22:53). God was in control and His purposed timing for the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed was ‘between the two evenings’: the RV margin gives the Hebrew idiom as in Exodus 12:6.

So it came about that the Lord kept the Passover with His disciples early, at the start of Passover day in the evening, and by doing so there was still sufficient time between the two evenings for Christ our Passover to be sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:7). The crucifixion took place from nine in the morning till three in the afternoon, this being the third hour till the ninth hour Jewish time. Indeed, men in their blind hatred unwittingly kept God’s timing as to when the Lamb of God would be sacrificed.

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: Dr W.E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary* says the verb *pleroō*, translated ‘fulfilled’, means ‘to complete’—in relation to the future Passover. It appears that in this relation Matthew 26:29 applies too: ‘I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom’ (ESV). The commemoration of the Old Testament ordinance of Passover was about to be done away; it was to be replaced by the new, which was about to be completed in His sacrifice at Calvary [Comment 1].

For the disciples, then and now, we have the Remembrance to keep each Lord’s day, as we recall that wonderful expression of God’s love to us, in ‘Christ our

Passover lamb' (1 Cor. 5:7). Soon we will all be taken to glory, where He will share with us the completed fruit of His work in the eternal celebration of the Passover which He accomplished, bringing us out of enslavement to sin and into unending fellowship with God.

Significantly the completion of the old economy, which He desired so much, brought with it the awful suffering of the cross, while Psalm 104:15 shows us that wine gladdens the heart of man. Eternity will be a time of joyful celebration, as we share with our Saviour in the triumph of His work and exult in all the love, mercy and grace of our great God!

The application of these thoughts to our eternal state, shows that His sacrifice is the basis of our salvation and of our being gathered to Him in that future day, as those who have been saved by faith. The Remembrance, however, He gave us to keep is significantly based upon the 'new covenant' in His blood. It takes us, not to the Passover out of Egypt—and hence our sinful state, but rather to Sinai, where Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the covenant as they entered into a disciple relationship with God based upon obedience to His word (see Ex. 24:6-8), having already passed through their baptism in the Red Sea.

This in turn leads us to 1 Peter 1:1-2—'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood' (ESV). Peter goes on to show that our own obedience to God's righteous demands, beginning with our baptism, leads to our being 'sprinkled' with His blood, bringing us into the wonder of being 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession'; that, he says, 'you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people' (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Edwin Stanley

From Belfast: *Recovery from spiritual disappointment* In life we all will have mountain-top experiences and low valley appearances. When Jesus, speaking to Peter, said that 'Satan has asked to sift you as wheat', the Greek is plural and refers to all the disciples being tested, with Satan hoping to bring them all to spiritual ruin. So don't be dismayed or annoyed when it happens! Remember the promise of God and that His Son has prayed for you (John 17:6). The Lord Himself has made a request to His Father that Peter's and your faith would not fail (Heb. 7:25). Peter was

unaware of his spiritual condition and the spiritual battle that Jesus could see (Eph. 6:12). He felt brave in the presence of his Master and when surrounded by the disciples, but when alone he was intimidated by a humble servant girl, unable to stand firm in his faith.

We need to recognise our weaknesses to be better prepared and more aware of our union with Christ. Peter claimed exemption from this self-weakness: he was too self-assured, even exclaiming that others would fail but not he (Mat. 26:33). We can easily be caught off guard as Satan's snare closes in because of our own undetected weaknesses. Disturbed, disappointed and dejected, Peter followed afar off! Startling words! When morale is low our need is just like that of Peter, James and John in the garden, where they only had to watch and pray against temptation. Peter reflects on this in his first letter where he in effect is saying, Learn from me and my mistakes and 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks' (1 Pet. 3:15 NIV).

His confidence was in the flesh—the mindset of the sinful man (Rom. 8:5). This was why Jesus rebuked him (Mat. 16:23), as he was not mindful of the things of the Spirit. The mindset of our new man has a connection established in accordance with the things of the Spirit and is 'set on what the Spirit desires' (Rom. 8:5). We are to be controlled by the Spirit, and are reminded that this is our life and peace. Our life is set upon a pathway that is to be led on by the authority of the Holy Spirit—that is, if we submit to His will. The Spirit of God is earnestly pointing us toward the Father in heaven, much like the needle of a compass which always shows the way to true North. The Spirit—indeed the Trinity, is working for us in ways which one day will be revealed. Satan did not achieve his aim of crushing Peter or the disciples, but this had nothing to do with Peter: Jesus had prayed that his faith would not fail. How many times do we read the words of Jesus telling people that their 'faith has made you well'? Your faith—'Firm Attitude In The Heart'—is the connection between heaven and earth, and is strengthened mainly through regular communion with Christ. After all, faith is like WiFi—it's invisible, but has the power to connect you to what you need!

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *Behind the Lord's instruction* '... let him sell his cloke, and buy a sword. For I say unto you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in me, And he was reckoned with transgressors ... And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough' (Luke 22:36-38 RV). The Lord was not inciting His disciples to violent resistance; He was making explicit to them the fulfilment of Isaiah 53:12 which states that He would be 'numbered with the transgressors'. He

was soon to be wrongfully condemned, crucified between two criminals.

In a world where the carrying of weapons for self-defence was not uncommon, the fact that one or two of His followers had a sword in their possession may simply have provided a convenient pretext for the authorities to justify His arrest. Whatever the Lord meant, He did not have armed resistance in mind as the following scriptures plainly show: 'Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also' (Mat. 5:38-39). This shows that the Lord was not an advocate of merely 'non violent resistance'; rather, He taught a doctrine of no resistance, deliberately choosing to respond to violence and aggression with a dignified suffering of the injustice. The apostles' teaching is consistent with this. Peter wrote: 'Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example ... who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously' (1 Pet. 2:21-23). This reveals the deep impression the Lord's example had made on Peter, to whom He had said when Peter chopped off the ear of the High Priest's servant: 'Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword' (Mat. 26:52).

To Pilate, our Lord said: 'My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence' (John 18:36). Those preceding two verses make it very clear that disciples of the Lord Jesus should not take up arms, either in self-defence or in military action, because they are followers of one whose kingdom does not belong to this world and therefore will not be defended or advanced by martial actions.

The day is fast approaching, however, when our Lord will slay the kings of the earth and their armies with the sword of His mouth, i.e., they will be killed in one devastating moment by a word of divine command (Rev. 19:20-21). Then will be fulfilled the angelic pronouncement: 'The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 11:15). Then all the wrongs that evil men ever had done to Christ's followers will be put right, for God 'shall wipe away every tear from their eyes' (Rev. 21:4) [Comment 2].

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: *A new remembrance and a new covenant* The Passover was an annual remembrance of the release of the Jews from the bondage of Egypt (Ex. 12:23-28). It began on the 14th day of the month Nisan in the springtime and was observed by the Jews in the slaying of a sacrificial lamb (Deuteronomy 16:2 suggests

that other animals of flock or herd could be used.) The beast was to be roasted: no bone of it was to be broken, and it must all be eaten and the remains burned on the first day. There was no set location for the Passover to take place, except it be specified by the Lord; so Jesus directed His disciples to the upper room where the Passover was to be celebrated. It would seem, in Luke 22, that Jesus took part in the Passover before, towards the end of the meal, taking the bread and breaking it, then taking the wine, giving each to His disciples saying, 'Do this in remembrance of me'. This was to be the new Remembrance held after His death, and was to be kept by both Jew and Gentile.

In Old Testament times the Lord made many covenants with His people, such as with Noah (Gen. 9), Abraham (Gen. 15 and 17), Moses (Ex. 19), Phinehas (Num. 25), and David (2 Sam. 7). Each covenant involved commitment by both the Lord and the recipient. In all cases He upheld His promise, but men could not respond with complete obedience. In Jeremiah 31:31–34 a 'new covenant' is foretold in which sin and wickedness will be remembered no more.

In Luke 22 Jesus, in taking the cup, says 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you'. (Matthew's account adds 'for the forgiveness of sins'.) He was foretelling the giving of Himself to the Father as the perfect sacrifice, giving us in return complete freedom from our sins. The Lord Jesus has completed His part of the covenant: all we have to do is confess (1 John 1:9) and accept His offer of forgiveness.

David Hickling

From Derby: The Lord yearned to share the Passover with His disciples, as it was to be the final time He would eat of it before He offered Himself as the perfect Passover Lamb. When He gave thanks and broke the bread for His disciples in order to say this was His body, and likewise with the cup, this is what He could not symbolically partake of with them as it was intended to represent Himself [Comment 3]. The expression, 'until the kingdom of God shall come' equates to the passage in Matthew 26:29 when the Lord would drink of the fruit of the vine anew in His Father's kingdom. As this appears to be a future time, it would seem to indicate the marriage of the Lamb in Revelation 19:9 [Comment 4]. Although it was felt that there would not be any need to have kept the Passover, because the Lord was about to become the perfect Passover Lamb, in Matthew 5:17 the Lord stated that He had come to fulfil the law and the prophets, not to abolish them. Therefore it was right for the Lord and His disciples to keep the last Passover. In 1 Corinthians 11:25 it is stated that the wine of the new covenant represents the blood outpoured when Jesus gave His life

to save us from a worse bondage than that which Israel faced in Egypt.

In John 13:5 we see the example of the Lord in a position of service, yet the one to whom all authority had been given. So because of this—with our aim to be more Christlike—all who are in leadership roles ought to serve the people. The brother who goes to the table on the Lord's Day is in a position of leading the assembly and serving the assembly.

The Lord was preparing the scene of a transgressor so that the prophecy in Isaiah 53 could be fulfilled that He was 'numbered with the transgressors'. But the Lord knew that He was not going to be with the disciples to protect them, and from then on they were on their own for a short while.

Robert Foster

From Greenock: What a motley crew was assembled for the Passion events that would conclude that week! People who represented every generation such as ambitious and ruthless rulers like Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate and devious and scheming high priests like Annas and Caiaphas who cared not for the people but for the preservation of their tenuous position that they held under Roman authority. The fickle people who had acclaimed Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of David at the beginning of the week, and at the end of the week uttered that damning imprecation, 'His blood be upon us, and on our children!' [Comment 5].

Jesus was an enigma to the Jewish nation, the antithesis of the deliverer that they were expecting who would free them from the yoke of Roman bondage. He had created everything, yet owned nothing. He was an itinerant preacher who taught peace and love to all who would listen, even to His enemies. The nation had seen His supernatural miracles, healing all manner of diseases, feeding the multitudes, raising the dead. He was a deliverer from sin, disease and death, but that was not the kind of deliverer the people wanted when they were still under the heel of Roman domination. Sin does not trouble some people: how would a Saviour from sin delight them?

The week had begun triumphantly, with Jesus entering Jerusalem, acclaimed by the crowds with their shouts, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mat. 21:9 NIV) which acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, the king of Israel. The week ended with His being rejected by the people and deserted by His disciples. The gulf between the Lord's knowledge of and acceptance of the cross, and what the disciples had hoped for was unbridgeable. The

disciples had thought that the procession through Jerusalem would lead to Jesus being crowned as king and that they would have preeminent places in His kingdom. They became increasingly disillusioned as the days went by, and they saw their dreams shattered. Their visions of glory were not to be realised, and the end of the week would lead not to a glorious throne but to Gethsemane and Golgotha. Jesus, their Lord and Master, in whom they had such high hopes, would die on a Roman cross like a common criminal.

They slept in Gethsemane (the oil press) for very sorrow, their hopes dashed. They had been asleep when Jesus was in unutterable anguish crushed by the expectation of the weight of sin that He was to endure on the cross. His sweat was as blood, but that was not the efficacious blood that would save sinners who would believe on Him. The blood that would be shed for the sins of the world was that which issued when His side was pierced. God then accepted the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb of God as an atonement for believing sinners. Eve came from Adam's side; the Church the Body issued from the side of the Saviour and Redeemer.

The disciples were in too much of a hurry. When the Lord comes in His millennial kingdom the disciples will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (v.30), and their names will be on the foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).

John Peddie

From Halifax: *Appointed time* When Jeroboam had been made king over Israel (1 Kin. 12:20), he ordained a feast (v.32) in the eighth month—'a month of his own choosing' (v.33 NIV). In completing his religious innovations Jeroboam instituted this feast, 'no doubt rivalling the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month in Jerusalem' (Patterson and Austel, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4, 1988, p.118). In his wickedness Jeroboam presumptuously treated 'the feasts of the LORD' (Lev. 23:2, 4, 37, 44 KJV)—'the solemn feasts of the LORD our God' (2 Chr. 2:4). These feasts were 'set' feasts (1 Chr. 23:31; 2 Chr. 31:3; Ezra 3:5; Neh. 10:33) and include 'the LORD'S passover' (Ex. 12:11, 27; Lev. 23:5), which was also to be kept 'in its appointed season' (Num. 9:2 RV). Luke, with his usual attention to detail, writes: 'And the day of unleavened bread came, on which the passover must be sacrificed' (Luke 22:7).

Jesus' enemies had already sought to take Him; but 'no man laid his hand on him, because his hour was not yet come' (John 7:30; cf. 8:20). Again we learn that God has His appointed times. 'Judas', Jesus said, 'betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?' (Luke 22:48); and to the chief priests, captains of the temple and the elders, He said, 'Are ye come out, as against a robber, with swords and staves?' (v.52).

Of course, when Jesus was daily in the temple no hands were stretched out against Him (v.53); but now the time of His betrayal had come. Thus had begun 'their hour'. 'That is,' writes Clarke, 'the time in which you are permitted to unrein your malice; which ye could not do before' (*Commentary on the Bible*). Even though it was their hour, that hour was appointed to them in God's sovereignty.

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): The significance of the Lord's not eating the Passover shows there is a transition from the Old Testament sacrifices to the New Testament of grace. It marks the beginning of a circumcision of human hearts (Jer. 31:31-33). This began in the days when the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled. God no longer uses prophets, but Christ, to speak to us (Heb. 1:1). The foundation is now Christ and no other (1 Cor. 3:11). This happens because the first testament was not perfect and there was need for the new one. Our favourite hymn reads:

'No blood, no altar now, the sacrifice is o'er;
No flame, no smoke ascends on high,
The lamb is slain no more.'

That is why Jesus said, 'It is finished.' There is no more sacrifice except that which is Jesus Christ.

In verse 35 Jesus reminded the disciples of His instruction when He first sent them out to evangelise. That means He was their provider, i.e. Jehovah Jireh. So, nobody was hungry because He provided for all their needs. When He was no longer with them physically they needed to fend for themselves. We see this in the book of Acts where the disciples had to sell what they had in order to provide for the needs of the church. As Christians, we don't need to be lazy. We have some needs to cater for, especially in the church. This is not the time when manna can fall from heaven.

First, when one realises that one has sinned, there is an urgent need for a sorrowful heart, followed by repentance (Ps. 51:17; Luke 22:61-62). It is somebody who has been restored who can help to restore others. The importance of the sorrow is to put an end to the evil committed and its spiritual disappointment. This was seen in the life of David when he was so deeply remorseful because of his sin of adultery when Nathan accused him. Peter also cried bitterly when he looked at Jesus' face, realising his sin of denial of Jesus Christ.

There is also need repeatedly to examine ourselves to know whether we are still in the faith. We should equally trust God that He is always ready to forgive our sins (1

John 1:8-9). This assurance, however, has not given us allowance to sin deliberately (Prov. 28:13; Heb. 10:26). There is a lesson to learn here, that if Peter fell, zealous as he was, anybody can! We are all vulnerable to sin, but the beauty is that Jesus prays for us. So, whoever thinks he stands should be careful (1 Cor. 10:12).

Samson Ogunleye

From Okorikpehre: *Linking the cup* The cup symbolized Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. The death was a fulfilment of the prophecy about Christ as the seed of the woman that God promised would crush the head of the serpent and would, through Abraham, bless the nations.

The Lord, being the mediator (Heb. 12:22-24) of the New Covenant, needed to die to make it effective, thereby making obsolete the Old Covenant (Heb. 9:15-18). The New Covenant brought to fulfilment the promises of the previous covenants from Adam, through Abraham, Moses to David. These promises, with all their blessings and responsibilities, belong to the people of God who are so called to partake of the cup. The New Covenant fulfilled all the Old Testament promises in the new Israel (Gal. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Acts 15:14-18).

A servant leading? Influence does not come from control but through service. Service is about caring, and people will more normally identify with a caring leader than with one who has knowledge or issues commands. This was clearly shown by the Lord when the disciples argued as to who was the greatest (Luke 22:24-27). 'I am among you as one who serves' is a fitting description of the Lord's leadership style. This 'bottom top' approach, in contrast with the world's standard, is relational and effective.

We referred to another of the Lord's lessons on service in John 13. One of the disciples was needed to do the supposed 'menial job' of washing dusty feet. The Lord, to the amazement of all, stooped to do the unimaginable.

The teaching and infectious examples of the Lord in meeting needs and empowering people was possible because He led from a position of service. 'For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45 NASB).

Richard Owotorufa

From Ravulapalem: Satan desired to have Peter that he should be sifted as wheat, but Jesus had prayed for him that his faith would not fail, commanding him to

strengthen the brothers after conversion. This does not mean that Peter had not been converted, for he had followed Christ for over three years. Rather, it refers to the fact that he was headed for a fall, and that he would come back to God by becoming stronger than he had been before. There was thankfully, by the Lord's intercession for him, a change of heart, life and conduct (Luke 22:32) .

David was renewed again after he committed sin (Ps. 51:1-14). The gospel teaches forgiveness more than once—even 490 times (Mat. 18:21-22). 'And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father' (1 John 2:1-2 RV). What is this advocate for if not to restore backsliders to God? 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins' (1 John 1:9).

Jesus made Peter skilful by reinstating him at the sea of Tiberius when he was told to cast the net on the right side. He asked Peter thrice whether he loved Him, then to feed and take care of his lambs. This is the threefold commission put on Peter by the Lord (John 21).

The early chapters of Acts show how Peter led many people to the churches of God. The two letters written by him are matured advice of strength, even as Jesus prayed in verse 32. The phrases 'living hope ... inheritance that can never perish ... joy unspeakable and full of glory ... precious blood as of a lamb without blemish ... living stones ... interrogation of a good conscience ... the crown of glory that fadeth not away ... guard so that you may not fall again ... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord ...' all reveal his strength after recovery from spiritual disappointment. The Lord only is the source of this recovery!

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: There is an exactness to God's divine providence that fortifies the hearts of all believing ones: 'Thus God determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by oath ... This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast ...' (Heb. 6:17-20 NKJV). Every deed of God is deliberate and for His pleasure, in a most pure and unselfish way: 'As for God His way is perfect ... He is a shield to all who trust in Him' (Ps. 18:30). God not only changes the times and seasons (Dan. 2:21), He determines all people's pre-appointed times (Acts 17:26), sets times and seasons by His own power (Acts 1:7) and does everything according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11).

It was a period of sustained evil activity the Lord Himself headlined in the garden of Gethsemane: 'But this is your hour, when darkness reigns' (Luke 22:53 NIV). The

Lord in His divine nature knew that the onslaught of satanic opposition was gathering momentum. It was in this knowledge that He notified Peter of Satan's request to sift him. The sifting of Satan is to bring the worst out of saints always, and this Satan would achieve but for Christ's assurance of His prayers.

God has been gracious to provide for us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). The Lord, having partaken of our nature, knows our infirmities and will always provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 4:15). For Peter, the temptation was preceded by the assurance of the Lord's prayer. It is the knowledge that every victory recorded in the war against evil is due solely to the help of God that strengthens us in our walk with Him. Admittedly so where, as in Peter's case, we stumble and fail the Master, we can put this disappointment to positive use again because of the knowledge that it is God who restores us: 'I have prayed for you that your faith does not fail; and when you are restored, strengthen your brothers.' We can draw strength from our weakness and failure because we know that in all things God works for the good of those who put their trust in Him (Rom. 8:28).

Frederick F. Ntido

From Warri: *Recovering from spiritual disappointments* One of life's lessons is that even the strongest of Christians can slip. We can be caught off guard and fail God miserably. This was perhaps in David's heart when he cried, 'Help Lord ... the faithful fail from among the sons of men' (Ps. 12:1 KJV). While recognizing that it is human to err, it's important to be willing to repent, dust ourselves and move on. This, of course, begins with promptings from the Spirit of God as none can promote a righteous thought (Phil. 2:13).

Peter is a good example of how God works through weak, frail and sinful persons to accomplish His purposes. We noted that while the four Gospel writers gave accounts of Peter's denial of the Lord; only Luke described the role of the adversary in the temptation (Luke 22:31). When questioned about being a disciple of the Lord, Peter denied it. He denied being with Jesus (v.57), being one of His disciples (v.58), and even knowing Jesus (v.60)! The rooster crowed after the third questioning and the Lord 'turned and looked upon Peter.' Peter could not resist the love and grief in those piercing, penetrating eyes. He went out and wept bitterly. It was not enough for Peter to be remorseful. His was a 'godly sorrow' that led him to repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-11).

The Lord forgave Peter with a charge to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32). His recovery is demonstrated later in the Acts of the Apostles when he preached that

great sermon proclaiming Jesus as Lord of all, with at least 3000 conversions. Peter had been graciously led through the path of 'repentance, returning and repeating' the first works, as exemplified in the Lord's message to the Asian churches of God in Revelation. The description of the devil as a 'roaring lion seeking whom he may devour' (1 Pet. 5:8) was from a man speaking from experience.

The believer is thus a 'work in progress'. Failure on our part should not be seen or treated as final. In John 21, at another 'fire' place, Peter reaffirmed his love for the Lord three times. Recovery is possible!

'There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin.

There's a door that is open and you may go in.

At Calvary's cross is where you begin,

When you come as a sinner to Jesus.'

This is as true for the believer as it is for the unbeliever.

Lawrence Onyokoko

COMMENTS

1. (Aberkenfig): The Greek word for 'new' in the Matthew scripture quoted is *kainos*, signifying what is qualitatively new and indicating that there will be a renewal in some form of the Remembrance similar to what we know and do today, bearing in mind the present commemoration is the proclaiming of the Lord's death till He come (1 Cor. 11:26). Luke 22:16, in its setting, would appear to be saying the Passover as such will have 'had its day' at the time of the inauguration of the kingdom of God (cp. Acts 1:3, 13-14; 2:41-42, 47).

R.B.F.

2. (Buckhaven): Whilst agreeing with what is said here about the Lord's approach to violent struggle and armed conflict, how are we to interpret His words in Luke 22:35-38? First, He reminds them of His provision. In 9:1-6, He had sent them out with the gospel of the kingdom and power to heal. Though they went with nothing but their faith, He had met their every need, as they now readily acknowledged. But that was a day of ingathering, a day of joy; this was the hour of the power of darkness (v.53), in which He would be arrested, manhandled and shamefully abused. It was a night of peril for the disciples too, as Peter's experience in the court of the high priest showed. Their lives were in danger as followers of the one being numbered with the transgressors. And yet, their experience among the villages of Israel must

strengthen their resolve. He had provided for them there, and would do so again within the walls of Jerusalem.

3. (Derby): *Why did the Lord not eat the bread and drink the wine when the Remembrance was instituted?* The objection friends raise could also apply to the Passover: the lamb represented Christ, so why should the Lord partake of it as He did (Luke 22:11)? I would rather find the reason in the thought that while He participated in the Passover by grace because He had made Himself subject to the Law for His people, He was now emphasising that the Remembrance was for the disciples to keep, for their future help through the weeks and years of their testimony, towards God and towards man. It was they who were to form the good habit of remembering, whereas His own memory of His passion is perfect. We may see also His considerateness for them, preparing them to think and act as they would have to do when He had left this world. It has been observed that the text can bear the sense, 'I will no more drink of the vine', noting the words in Matthew 26:29 'from now on'. These phrases, however, can still be understood as not excluding this occasion. A more weighty thought to me is that those who partake of the bread become one body, one bread (1 Cor. 10:17). But the theme there is the uniting of the saints together in feeding on their Lord, related also to their being united with Him, but with the emphasis on their need, not His.

M.A.

4. (Derby): I agree this does relate to a future time, but would understand it as having reference to the Millennium, since He speaks of when the kingdom of God comes, which presumably means comes to earth.

J.T.N.

5. (Greenock): It is really a misconception that has long been in vogue that it was the very people who acclaimed the Lord with praise on His entry to Jerusalem were the same ones to cry 'His blood be on us, and on our children' and 'Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him' (Mat.27:25; John 12:12-13). This is also confirmed by Luke's account of His triumphal entry to the city, in fulfilment of O.T. prophecy (see 19:36-40).

R.B.F.

Questions ...

From Cromer:

Question 1 Does the Passover commemoration still have any relevance to us today?

Question 2 Acts 20:7 indicates that the disciples undertook this Remembrance on the first day of the week. What other grounds do we have for following this principle?

... and Answers

Question 1 Since the sacrifices of the Old Covenant were fulfilled in Christ's one sacrifice at Calvary, on which the New Covenant depends, worshippers from Pentecost were no longer required to offer the Passover. The faithful believer, however, loves to revisit its instructions for the night of deliverance in Egypt, and its revivals thereafter by Hezekiah, Josiah, with the effect on the remnant people of the renewal of the Covenant under Nehemiah in his book Chapters 8-10, which would include the order of the Passover. We can there gather beautiful foreshadows of our Lord's life and death, and our own deliverance from sin, since those things were written for our learning also (1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 9:9, 10:1).

Question 2 Paul instructed that collections be made for maintenance of the Lord's servants on the first day of the week, so that day was an expected meeting point for the churches (1 Cor. 16:1-2). When John was exiled to Patmos, an island used for Roman imprisonment, he 'was in the Spirit on the Lord's day' (Rev. 1:10). In that isolation under a Gentile power, how did John know the first day of the week, except by counting the days because that one was precious to him as belonging to the Lord, being the day of His resurrection, and so was also fitting for His remembrance? Many have also seen relevance in the Lord appearing to the disciples in the evening of His resurrection day (John 20:19). The steadfastness with which the first saints in the church in Jerusalem kept the Breaking of bread (Acts 2:42) would be hard to observe if the occasion was less frequent than weekly

M.A.

DEATH OVERCOME BY DEATH (Luke 23)

Among the signs which accompanied the death of the Lord Jesus, Matthew records that 'the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised' (Mat. 27:51-52 ESV). The cosmic effects were being felt as the eternal Son 'without [whom] was not anything made that was made' (John 1:3) and who 'upholds the universe by the word of his power' (Heb. 1:3) yielded up His spirit and passed into death.

Associated with this was the last of the resurrections connected with the earthly ministry of the Lord. To many Jews, resurrection found a place in the Old Testament scriptures, but veiled in poetic language which limited their understanding. They could recall the confidence of Job that, though his skin had been destroyed, he would yet be clothed in flesh at the last and gaze upon his Redeemer (Job 19:25-27). It was a confidence shared by David, who trusted God not to abandon his soul to the corruption of the grave (Ps. 16:10). They looked forward to a resurrection brought about at the end of the world when 'many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and

some to shame and everlasting contempt' (Dan. 12:2). Yet to some there remained uncertainty, evidenced by the unbelief of the Sadducees, who argued against a bodily resurrection (Mat. 22:23).

The ministry of the Lord should have dispelled any such doubts. When the disciples of John came to Him, He answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard ... the dead are raised up' (Luke 7:22). Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus all bore testimony to the life giving power of the Son (1 John 5:12), before whom death held no sway. And yet the raising of them was in anticipation of the raising of Him whom Paul described as 'the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Cor. 15:20). And for Him to be raised, as He had promised the disciples (Luke 9:22), He too first must die.

Having poured out His life on the cross, the Lord descended to the grave to take hold of the captives (Eph. 4:8 10). As He did so, the tombs of Old Testament saints burst open as men [and women of faith were restored to mortal life. It was a resurrection qualitatively different from that which

awaits those who are in Christ, when 'the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality' (1 Cor. 15:54). But it was a fulsome declaration that, by dying, He had won an eternal victory over death. In life, He had raised up individuals in the sorrow of their own

circumstances, but in death He raised them all together, having 'abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1:10). 'As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Cor. 15:22).

J.T.N.

From Study Groups

'HE DELIVERED JESUS OVER TO THEIR WILL' (Luke 22:66–23:56)

From Aberdeen: The chief priests, scribes and elders immediately grasped the significance of 'the Son of man ... seated at the right hand of the power of God' as evidenced by their swift response: 'Art thou then the Son of God?' (Luke 22:69-70 RV). Jesus clearly acknowledges His deity by His answer: 'Ye say it because I am' (22:70 RVM). The matter of blasphemy was now settled in their misguided view. 'What further need have we of witness? for we ourselves have heard from his own mouth.'

They were blinded to the deity of Christ because of their hatred towards Him. The 'green tree' (Luke 23:31) may indicate the presence of the Son of God on earth to seek and save lost sinners. The 'dry tree' possibly indicates the cruel treatment that the Jews (as the dry tree) would experience at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70. Additionally, there may be a future fulfilment of cruel treatment awaiting the Jews of Jerusalem at the time of the Great Tribulation [Comment 1].

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: In the portion before us we find the evil acts of men, driven by Satan, heaped upon the blessed Son of God. Instead of being in the Council's meeting hall, the hearing was in the High Priest's palace, in secret and at night, with no advocate for the accused being provided. The farce was further exacerbated with the accused compelled to testify against Himself. Rather than the Council arguing for acquittal they were out for a conviction. Furthermore, we suggest the soldiers would be court-martialled if they treated a prisoner in such a way (certainly today) especially

when a properly legally constituted trial had not taken place. Jesus quietly endured their brutality, and the heavens were silent.

There were 18 ‘malpractices of trial’ in the trial of Jesus (see Deut. 17:6-7 and 19:15-20; and *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 1:6 to 11:2), and there were 6 illegal trials (Annas, Caiaphas, Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod and Pilate again). For further information, see ‘The Illegality of Jesus’ Religious and Civil Trials’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (July September pp. 330-342).

The questioning (Luke 22:67) was such that the Council, having failed to craft a credible case against Jesus (a clear violation of Sanhedrin rules), was blind to their own Scriptures and deaf to the Word that Jesus had taught for three years. By claiming to sit at God’s right hand, Jesus was affirming that He was the Son of God, the Messiah (Ps. 110:1); words that are quoted in Acts 2:34 and 5:31.

The official place of judgement, called ‘the Chamber of Hewn Stone’, was a semi-circular hall situated towards the east end of the Temple, designed to resemble a threshing floor. This was a communal area where farmers in previous generations would have separated the wheat from the chaff. Subsequently, it came to be the place of separation of truth from fiction in terms of justice. Sadly this was where Israel bred rebellion against God, where Satan ruled his dominion of evil—not in Rome but in Jerusalem.

It would appear from history (Josephus and others) that we can deduce that the characters of Pilate and Herod were unsavoury at best. They were primarily interested in protecting their own backs, yet beneath the facade they were cowards and hypocrites. In the presence of their soldiers (and armies) they showed authority, but on their own they were indecisive, as Genesis 49:4 states concerning Reuben: ‘unstable as water’.

Pilate’s strategy failed on two counts First, he had failed to solve the problem as to whose jurisdiction it was; and secondly, his ‘bluff’ in releasing a prisoner meant that the crowd, in demanding Barabbas, presented another problem for himself which would no doubt risk the wrath of Tiberius, the emperor. Although he tried twice more to argue for the release of Jesus, promising ‘to teach Him a lesson’ (using the same verb as in Luke 23:16), he delivered up Jesus to crucifixion. Cicero described it as ‘the most extreme of torture inflicted upon slaves’, while Tacitus called it ‘a despicable death’ The onlookers and mourners on the processional route were addressed by the Lord as they went to the place of execution. He would rise again, but the official

leaders, would suffer unspeakable agony for their crime against God (cp. 21:20-24). The religious rulers were fulfilling the words of Hosea 10:8.

The daughters of Jerusalem were told, 'Do not to weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children' (Luke 23:28 ESV). Now the destruction of Jerusalem is foretold in two proverbial sayings: Israeli women would count it a blessing to be childless in marriage and they 'call upon the mountains to cover them'. Then we have the comparison of the green wood and the dry wood: green sap filled wood does not catch fire nearly so quickly as dead dry wood. The judgement falling on Him, horrific as that was, cannot be compared with the coming condemning fire on those who conspired against the Lord [Comment 2].

Bill Paterson

From Belfast: *What made the thief believe that Jesus would come into his kingdom? 'A death bed conversion, possibly, the only one contained in the New Testament, so that no one would despair; but only one so that no one would presume' (T. Guthrie).*

Both the robbers heaped insults on Him (Mat. 27:44), yet one was saved and the other was lost. A true demonstration of life in this world where we are all sinners, due the just rewards for our iniquities, yet through the exceeding greatness of His mercy—the chosen one through whom redemption comes—we are redeemed if we trust in Him. All sin separates from God, but the one thing that makes separation permanent is not the sin but the ignorance of it. Transgression does not shut us out of mercy, it merely makes us the subject for the mercy (Rom. 5:20) [Comment 3].

So why the turnaround from scoffing to salvation? Time spent in the presence of Jesus, listening to how He interacted with those around Him. Hours spent on the cross helped the thief to see that the Man in the middle was certainly someone else, something that he had never encountered in his short life. The rulers sneered saying, 'He saved others; let him save Himself.' The soldiers said, 'If you are the king, save yourself' The other criminal hurled insults saying 'Save yourself and us.' The sign above Jesus' cross said 'King of the Jews'. There seems to have been a lot of reference made to being saved and that this Man was a king. All of this had an impact on his perception of who this Man was, culminating in his own request to the King to be remembered in salvation [Comment 4].

Several things can be gleaned from this:

(i) this thief recognised God as sovereign ('Don't you fear God?');

- (ii) he knew that he himself was a sinner (punished justly);
- (iii) he knew that Jesus was innocent;
- (iv) he called out to Jesus for help; and
- (v) he believed in the promise of everlasting life.

The thief knew that he was going to die yet he still asked to be remembered when the King came into His kingdom. And his request, like that of all who come to Jesus Christ and are answered far beyond their expectations, received the assurance from Jesus, 'You shall be with me.' Possibly the thief had some distant time in mind, but Jesus said 'today'; he looked only for a kingdom, but Jesus promised him 'paradise'.

Sean Johnston

From Buckhaven: *An expression of Christ's deity* 'But from henceforth shall the Son of man be seated at the right hand of the power of God' (Luke 2:69 RV). This implied equality with God. The Jews had a problem with this word because they took Deuteronomy 6:4 literally and in isolation from other scriptures: 'Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD ...' They denied the plurality of the Godhead as expressed in Genesis 1:26—'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'; or Psalm 110:1—'The LORD saith unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.' In the minds of the Sanhedrin, therefore, any person who made such a claim was deemed to be a blasphemer. This is why they fastened on the Lord's statement and asked the further question, 'Are you then the Son of God?' (Luke 22:70), because the answer to that question would provide them with 'the evidence' they needed to convict the Lord of blasphemy, as they saw it. The Lord's answer, 'Ye say that I am' (v.70) could also be translated 'You say this because I am [the Son of God]' (RVM). 'What further need have we of witnesses?' (v.71), said the Jewish leaders; in their eyes the Lord's statement was confirmation of His guilt.

This was not the first time the Lord Jesus had made statements that could only be understood by the Jews as expressions of His deity. In John 8:58 the Lord said 'before Abraham was, I am.' By this statement He was not just saying 'I am God'; He was taking to Himself the Name by which Jehovah revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush, when He revealed His eternal nature in the statement 'I AM THAT I AM' or 'I AM WHO AM' (RVM) (Ex. 3:14). The Lord was claiming to be the great 'I AM', one and the same in identity and nature as the eternal God, supreme over all, who appeared to Moses. On that occasion the Jews took up stones to stone Him because of this assertion. They correctly understood that the Lord was claiming to be God.

Again, in John 10:30-34, the Jews would have stoned the Lord for blasphemy because He said, 'I and the Father are one'. On that occasion they accused him: 'Thou, being a man, maketh thyself God'. They flatly denied His claim to deity.

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples that He was God incarnate. When Philip said 'Shew us the Father' the Lord answered, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (John 14:9). His prayer in John 17—'glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was ...' (v.5)—further underlines His deity and expresses the eternal, equal relationship and oneness that the eternal Son has with God the Father.

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: *The Son of Man* This title of the Lord Jesus was the one which He most frequently used about Himself, although it sometimes caused bemusement among His hearers—see John 12:34. The ESV records a total of 80 occasions on which the Lord used the title; it signifies that He was the archetypal man—everything that man ought to be, but was not. On the occasion recorded in Luke 22:66-71 Jesus seems almost exasperated with the attitude of His interlocutors because they would neither believe nor give an unequivocal answer to His questions. His own statement clearly indicated that He had the right to be honoured with God the Father, and His hearers understood that, for they said, 'Are you the Son of God, then?' What Jesus said in reply, 'You say that I am', has the force in Hebrew of 'You say it, because I am', and that was understood to be blasphemy (v.71).

Pilate and Herod The characters of Pilate and Herod cannot be established from this chapter alone; we must compare what other scriptures add, and understanding of them is helped by secular records. Pilate was appointed procurator of the province of Judaea by the emperor Tiberius, with full control over the province, even to matters of life and death. Any decisions of the Sanhedrin had to be ratified by him. In spite of his power he was a weak man who did not have the moral courage to do what was right, but who was anxious to maintain his own position—examples of which have recurred throughout history: think of Hitler, Stalin and Chairman Mao. The leaders of the Jews knew exactly what sort of man Pilate was, when they said 'If you release this man you are not Caesar's friend' (John 19:12). After speaking to Jesus Pilate had come to the conclusion that He was not guilty of any crime (Mat. 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:4-5), but after the custom of casual cruelty characteristic of those days, he offered to flog Him and release Him.

Herod, called 'the Great', gained this title by his energetic works and monuments, but he too was very protective of his own status. He was suspicious and vindictive, putting to death even members of his own family, including his wife Mariamne. His character is revealed by the 'massacre of the innocents' in Matthew 2:16. The friendship between Pilate and Herod (Luke 23:12) arose from their common interest in disposing of Jesus, whom each regarded as a threat to his position.

The believing criminal During the period of the Feast the person of Jesus must have been a common subject of conversation and speculation, so that everyone had the opportunity to make up his mind if He was, in fact, who He claimed to be. One criminal did not accept that Jesus was the Christ, and by implication the other did. He accepted that Jesus was the Christ, God's anointed King, and he would be received that day into Christ's heavenly kingdom. That choice is still relevant today.

Peter Hickling

From Derby: 'But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD' (Luke 22:69 NASB). When He made this statement, the Lord was quoting from Psalm 110:1: 'The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."' Hebrews 1:3 also supports the truth of the Lord's statement: 'When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.' No doubt, those who were questioning the Lord at this stage would have known where He was quoting from. So far as they were concerned they thought He was playing into their hands. But the Lord was in total control. Following this, when asked if he was the Son of God, He replied, 'Yes, I am.' Some versions put it, 'Ye say that I am.' On the face of it, this sounds evasive, when in fact the Lord could not have been more direct [see Buckhaven paper, end of para. 1—*Eds.*]. It was on this basis that the Lord was sent to his death, not on any trumped up charges.

Pilate's character Smith's Bible Dictionary gives some details of Pilate's life. He was appointed in A.D. 25-26 as the sixth Roman procurator of Judea during the reign of Tiberius. One of his first acts was to relocate the army headquarters from Caesarea to Jerusalem, taking with them their standards, bearing the image of the emperor. In response to the forceful complaint of the people, Pilate ordered his soldiers to surround the petitioners and put them to death unless they ceased to trouble him. When they declared themselves ready to submit to death, rather than forego their resistance, Pilate yielded and the standards were returned to Caesarea. His slaughter of the Galileans, recounted in Luke 13:1, may have occurred at a feast at Jerusalem, since the procurator would reside at Jerusalem during the great feasts, to preserve

order. Accordingly, at the time of the Lord's last Passover, Pilate was occupying his official residence in Herod's palace. Josephus recounts that Pilate's anxiety to avoid offending Caesar did not save him from political disaster, as later Pilate led his troops against Samaria. The Samaritans complained to Vitellius, then president of Syria, and he sent Pilate to Rome to answer their accusations before the emperor. When Pilate arrived, he found Tiberius dead and Caligula on the throne. Eusebius adds that soon afterward 'wearied with misfortunes', Pilate killed himself.

The Lord was brought before Pilate, who, upon hearing the charges declared, 'I find no guilt in this man' (Luke 23:14). The mob appealed to Pilate's sense of self preservation: 'He stirs up the people ... Judea ... Galilee ...' When Pilate thought he could 'pass the buck', he sent the Lord to Herod, but this stratagem failed.

Herod's character Mark 6 provides some of the sordid details of Herod's life. Each time Herod heard John he was 'very perplexed', and yet he turned a deaf ear. It was Herod who had consented to the beheading of John, so when the Lord was brought before Herod, he had no word for him. Herod had had his day.

Luke records that Pilate and Herod became friends as a result of their dealing with the Lord. The Scriptures do not account for the enmity which had existed between them, although some suppose that this arose from Pilate's cruelty towards those under Herod's jurisdiction (Luke 13:1). Both Pilate and Herod viewed the Lord as a threat to their position. Pilate as Procurator did not want an uprising. Had word got back to Caesar his days would have been numbered. Herod's position was also under threat. Since the Lord attracted great crowds, Herod could see the Lord being hailed as King in place of him.

The green and the dry In Isaiah 53:2 we read: 'For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground'. We felt that 'the green' was a reference to the Lord's presence on earth as the 'root out of parched ground'. 'The dry' would refer to the prophecy in the preceding verses. According to various sources this is when the Temple was laid waste some 40 years later, but it may also be a prophecy concerning the Tribulation [see Comment 1].

Laurence Foster

From Halifax: The kings of the earth stood up From Gethsemane (Mat. 26:36) Jesus was led away to Annas (John 18:12), and then to the palace of Caiaphas the high priest (Mat. 26:57; Mark 14:53). There they mocked and beat Jesus; they struck Him on the face (Luke 22:63; cp. Is. 50:6). As soon as it was day, the elders of the people,

the chief priests and the scribes took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death (Luke 22:66). The whole multitude, therefore, arose and led Him to Pontius Pilate. However, the Roman governor found no fault in Jesus. When Pilate heard that Jesus was a Galilean and belonged to 'Herod's jurisdiction' he sent Him to Herod, who at that time was in Jerusalem. Thus we have the fulfilment of Psalm 2:2, quoted in the apostolic song: 'The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ' (Acts 4:26 KJV).

Herod, with his soldiers, treated Jesus with contempt and arrayed Him 'in a gorgeous robe' (Luke 23:11). 'A white or shining robe, for this is the meaning of the original', says Barnes (*Notes on the Bible*). In this robe we perceive a token of our Lord's innocence, yet to these men it was intended as a means of derision. Jesus was then returned to Pilate. Neither he nor Herod had found anything worthy of death in Jesus (v.15); but he thought to chastise Him like a malefactor and release Him (v.16). 'Crucify him, crucify him', they cried (cf. Is. 59:14; 5:7). C.H. Spurgeon rightly observes: 'Where there is much rage there is generally some folly, and in this case there is an excess of it' (*The Treasury of David*). Pilate yielded at length to their importunity and 'he delivered Jesus to their will' (v.25), to those 'who hated him with a perfect hatred, and whose tender mercies were cruelty' (Matthew Henry). They led Him away to a place called Calvary where they crucified Him.

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): The insight we get into the characters of Pilate and Herod is that their conscience is marred. Both are hypocritical. They are like the waves of the sea. They later became friends, (Luke 23:12) as a result of their hypocrisy. 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin' (James 4:17 KJV). Another reference is Acts 4:26-28, stating that 'the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ' The duo followed what the people said, even though the scripture had warned not to 'follow a multitude to do evil' (Ex. 23:2). So we must maintain our stand as Christians to do the will of God, but never to be controlled by what people around us say. Pilate and Herod were truthful in Luke 23:14-15, but were not faithful, they spoke the truth but could not do it. As Christians we are expected to stand for the Lord no matter what comes our way.

In Luke 23:42 the thief received his own salvation in the midst of confusion. Nobody knows how many people received salvation that day, but the thief may have believed Jesus Christ to be the Son of God because:

- (i) Jesus begged for forgiveness for those who crucified Him (23:34);
- (ii) the centurion bore witness to this in Luke 23:47, and in verse 48 all the

congregation returned home beating their breasts. The lifestyle of Jesus also preached to the thief because that day of crucifixion was not the first day that he had heard about Jesus Christ (23:41); and

(iii) the temple veil was torn in two [The thief is unlikely to have known this, of course—*Eds.*]. The centurion could no longer hold his peace, so he voiced out in Matthew 27:54, 'Truly this was the Son of God.' Everything about Jesus made the thief also believe this constant fact.

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: Perhaps the simplest way to explain the Lord's statement comparing the 'green tree' to the 'dry' (Luke 23:31) is just to say it contrasts the optimal with the worst conditions; then it is comparing outcomes that match such prevailing conditions, 'these things' being compared to 'what will they do?' Unlike John 19:11, which indeed may focus on the high priest, here (in saying 'they do' these things) He is speaking generally, although the leaders of Israel and the Roman authority are inevitably included.

In considering 'green tree' conditions we may note three other interesting references to green olive trees. Genesis 8:11 shows God's use of a dove returning to the ark with a leaf or tender branch of an olive tree. It was to show Noah that the waters had receded and thus it indicated hopefulness. Olive trees especially are associated with agricultural blessing (Deut. 8:8; 28:40; 2 Kin. 18:32). Jeremiah 11:16 uses the green olive tree as evidence of fruitfulness, and thus is symbolic of the Lord's blessing on His people, the olive tree itself being one of the symbolic representations of the people of God (along with the vine and the fig). So we may conclude that the Lord is saying that despite His people being blessed in the best possible way by His presence, they have turned against Him and done 'these things'.

Psalms 52:8 is very telling, where the man of God describes himself as being like a green (flourishing) olive tree in the house of his God. This is an interesting figure of speech, since olivewood was not a part of the tabernacle (although used in construction of the sanctuary of Solomon's temple), and it is understood this is a psalm of David, when the ark was still within curtains. The Psalm provides its own explanation, going on to speak of the writer's patient, thankful trust in the steadfast love of God, which leaves him (like a green tree) unmoved from the place central to God's purposes, while the evildoers are uprooted from their tents. Psalms 52:2-3 are a valid description of those who stood in condemnation of the Lord as He made His way to Calvary.

Was this psalm particularly in the Lord's mind as He spoke? Bloodthirsty people were plotting the destruction of this green tree Man, but He was resolute. And if they thus behaved towards the green tree Man, how would they behave when facing the dry instead? The context (Luke 23:29-30, which also answers 'what will they do?') seems to indicate that the time of the 'dry' applies in the setting of Hosea's precursor prophecy (Hos. 9 10) and more so in what John would record of the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation 6:16. In contrast to the abundance of green tree provision, while the Lamb resolutely going on to Calvary is mercifully submitting to their every injustice, He would be sure to return as the victorious Lamb with judgment which is without mercy (James 2:13; Luke 19:27;22:69; Mat. 26:64) [Comment 5].

Geoff Hydon

From Okorikpehre: There were at least four phenomenal events that took place when Jesus died: the darkness, the rending of the curtain, the earthquake and the rising of some saints from the dead.

The darkness One of the plagues that God brought on the Egyptians before the killing of the passover lamb was the three days of darkness. It was so intense and was described as 'darkness that can be felt' (Ex. 10:21 NIV). Before Jesus died on the cross, there were three hours of darkness on the earth. This was not just a few minutes of an eclipse, as some critics suggest. It was the Passover time when the sun stopped shining (Luke 23:45). Only the Lord understood and felt in a spiritual sense the anguish of those moments of darkness. Isaiah's prophecy was being fulfilled as God 'laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Is. 53:6); 'God made him ... to be a sin offering for us' (2 Cor. 5:21 margin).

The rending of the curtain When the Lord's attention was drawn to the Temple, His reply was, 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down' (Mat. 24:1-2). This was fulfilled a few years later when the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple. God no longer dwells in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24). Herod's temple was considered the grandest of all the temples ever built. It had three distinctive courts: the outer court (the Court of the Gentiles), the inner court (the Court of the Jews) and the Holy of Holies (God's court). These courts acted not just as barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles but also between God and humanity. When Jesus triumphed on Calvary, God broke down the dividing walls and we were all made to be one in Christ. Additionally, we now have access and boldness to approach Him as a priesthood (Eph. 2:11-14,19; Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 2:5,9) [Comment 6].

The earthquake and the resurrections This was not the first recorded earthquake (Num. 16:32; 1 Kin. 19:11-12; Zech. 14:5). They usually symbolize or demonstrate the power of God. The power of death in this instance was being broken. Death was swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54; Heb. 2:14-15). Accompanying the earthquake was the resurrection of many Old Testament saints who are not part of the Church the body of Christ. We wondered if this happened at Jesus' death or resurrection, since the people did not go into the city until after the Lord's resurrection [Comment 7]. We reckoned that the Lord's resurrection was different from the others in that they died again. Those resurrections foreshadow what will be the lot of the dead in Christ when the Lord comes to the air (1 Thes. 4:16).

Richard Owotorufa, Lawrence Onyokoko

From Ravulapalem: What made the thief believe Jesus, especially regarding His kingdom? People who held Jesus mocked and struck Him. They covered His face with a cloth, striking Him, and then demanding that He should tell who had struck Him. When Jesus told the women not to weep, the two malefactors were also there. They heard the words 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34 RV); they saw the people parting His garments, and heard the rulers deride Him saying, 'Let him save himself, if this is the Christ of God, his chosen; and they saw the soldiers offer Him vinegar.

The thief observed the entire situation, the quietness of the Lord without blaming anybody, and strongly formed an opinion about Jesus's kingdom. The results were as follows: he feared God and rebuked his friend (Luke 23:40); acknowledged his own condemnation; confessed faith in Jesus who had been crucified solely because of religious jealousy and malice (v.41); accepted Jesus as Lord; had faith in the eventual triumph of His kingdom and sought mercy and forgiveness (v.42). The fruit of his faith was fulfilled when the penitent criminal went to Paradise (Luke 16:22).

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *Christ's deity understood?* It is a perpetually fascinating reality of the Scriptures that things are often not what they appear to be: 'But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"' (1 Sam. 16:7 NKJV). How thrillingly true it is in the events unfolded in the present verses! With deeply competing interests, some harmonizing on the basis of the Messiah's humiliation—'Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod

became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other' (Luke 23:11-12)—the supremacy of the Lord's counsel resounds powerfully.

To all appearances, '... Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison, but he delivered Jesus to their will' (Luke 23:24-25). The reality though is that the Lord Jesus was 'being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God ... taken by lawless hands ... crucified and put to death' (Acts 2:23).

The Lord Jesus' declaration—'Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God' (Luke 22:69)—left the well schooled religious leaders in no doubt as to the Lord's unalloyed claim to deity. It could not have been any less mistakable, for is the right hand not the symbol of exaltation and authority, and the posture of sitting proof of confidence in His position? Fresh in their thoughts too would have been David's prophetic words: 'The LORD said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool' (Ps. 110:1). Who then is this Son of Man who assumes the right to sit at the right hand of the power of God, if He is not in essence the Son of God?

The writer to the Hebrews gives a compelling picture of the Lord's deity thus: '... when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Heb. 1:3). The divine Son of God alone is able to sit at the right hand of His Father.

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen) The green tree and the dry tree appear to be seasons of the natural year. It is a valid interpretation that the dry tree represents the time of atrocity by the Romans in AD 70 and by world powers generally in the tribulation. For consistency, the green tree must also represent a time or season and would need to be that present time when Roman occupation was comparatively benign.

P.D.

In my understanding, the green tree is simply referring to the time the Lord Jesus was here on earth, in Israel, when everything He said and did was productive and effective—He was the tender plant and root out of a dry ground (Is. 53:2). All

benefited from Him being there for that short period of time. When He left there would be no escaping the fearful prospect of a land and people that would be bereft of His presence.

R.B.F.

2. (Aberkenfig): The judgment which fell upon the Lord for our sin was beyond comparison: 'Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger' (Lam. 1:12).

3. (Belfast): It goes without saying that this is the product of the grace of God, and not licence to continue in sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1).

J.T.N.

Sin with knowledge is worse than sin committed in ignorance, a distinction made in the law of sin offering, guilt offering and wilful sin, for which there could be no offering. Both surely separate man from God.

M.A.

4. (Belfast): The two criminals on either side of the Lord on the cross heaped insults on Him for an unknown period of time (Mat. 27:44). In my mind, it would be the conduct of the Lord in the midst of such trials and sufferings that spoke loudly to one of them, but perhaps most impactful of all was the Lord's prayer to His Father for 'forgiveness' (Luke 23:34). Not simply and only for His executioners, but the baying crowd demanding His death, all those responsible for putting Him there, and the world of sinners including ourselves. There was no thought of self, else He would have added 'to Me' at the end of the statement 'for they know not what they do' (v. 34a). All was for us, a guilty world, bringing about the conviction of a dying who acknowledged Him as his Saviour and King.

R.B.F.

5. (Mount Forest): Removing temporarily the word 'in' and replacing with 'to' so that things are done, not just (i) in the green tree but also (ii) to the Green Tree, provides the basis for precious personal meditation concerning the Saviour. In the process, the validity of the meditation on the Green Tree is proved by His (iii) exhibiting green tree character. But then, in the right and proper desire for scrupulous consistency, the dry tree is also presented by friends as being an applicable metaphor for the time of atrocity, and to the atrocities committed and to the character of those to whom they are perpetrated. These are the three answering points to those made

about the green tree. First and foremost, though, the focus is not on the Lord's suffering, as he said 'weep not for me', but on the coming suffering of the Jews.

P.D.

6. (Okorikpehre): Of the scriptures cited, Ephesians 2:11-14 and Galatians 3:28 have to do with the joining together of Jews and Gentiles into the body of Christ. This, Paul says, is the mystery of Christ, 'that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel' (Eph. 3:4- 6 ESV). In the body and by the work of the cross, God did indeed break down the dividing wall, by which Gentiles were enabled to be received into the promises and eternal purposes of God.

That is not, however, to my mind, the significance of the rending of the Temple veil. The Lord had already told the builders of Israel that 'the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits' (Mat. 21:43), and proclaimed the associated judgement on the city: 'your house is left to you desolate' (23:38). The tearing of the veil (significantly from the top to the bottom, which no man could undertake—27:51), was the declaration of God that His glory had departed from that house built by hands. With it, the old covenant of Moses had been superseded, and its regulations for worship replaced (Heb. 9:1). In the coming days, the priests must have sought to repair the veil, surely knowing from that time on that they were engaged in the service of an age which had passed away (9:8-9).

7. (Okorikpehre): It seems from Matthew 27:52-53 that the resurrection of these saints coincided with the death of the Lord, but (like Legion) they remained hidden among the tombs until the Lord had been raised. We may also speculate that these resurrected saints may have lived on for months, perhaps years, before passing on to glory, perhaps even taking their place in churches of God, to give a remarkable witness in the days of the apostles to the life giving power of the Son.

J.T.N.

THE EARLY DAWN, THE EMPTY TOMB, THE EMMAUS EXPERIENCE

Up probably before the springing of dawn, it was the womenfolk who had accompanied the Lord from His days in Galilee who were first to the tomb, as recorded by Luke. The start of a new day, air and ground refreshed by the dew of the night, made alive by the sound of the birds of the air with their dawn chorus heralding the miracle of sunrise, brought about a day like no other. The Lord had risen from among the dead. They were quickly surrounded by two heavenly messengers bearing unbelievable news—‘The Lord is risen.’ Despite concrete witness given to the eleven disciples, Luke reveals that Peter was the first to brush aside disbelief and sprint towards the cave that had accommodated the Lord’s precious body (Luke 23:55; 24:5-6, 11-12).

What had happened in the past 48 hours or so was the talk of the town, especially to the country folk travellers on their way back home from the big city! Undoubtedly the latest news about the Lord’s missing corpse

dominated the chatter. Then, a stranger out of nowhere, as it were, came alongside this pair and he had plenty to say when questioned about his seeming ignorance of current events. That soon changed when he gave a broadside and then spoke with such authority on the Scriptures, but it wasn’t until they reached home territory, after a long hike, and having pressed him to come in for something to eat, then asked to say grace at the table, they realized it was their Lord and Master. Though fatigued, the revelation of who this person really was, galvanized them to get back posthaste to Jerusalem, despite getting there in the early hours (Luke 24:14, 17-18, 25-27, 29-31, 33).

Editors and ‘backing team’ really appreciate the time taken, the effort expended, and the research undertaken and collated by contributors over another year. A big ‘Thank you’. We are sure it is all to the glory of God.

R.B.F.

From Study Groups

‘HE IS NOT HERE, BUT HAS RISEN’ (Luke 24)

From Aberdeen: It is worth remembering that Luke was a careful researcher. His evidence was gathered from those who ‘from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word’ (Luke 1:2 RV). Luke’s assurance to his readers is that he had ‘traced the course of all things accurately from the first’, so that we might have certainty about the momentous events of those days when Jesus walked among the Jewish nation.

Luke presents the events of the resurrection day in such a way that the reader is drawn into the unfolding drama. His recording of details is important in helping the reader to grasp the reality of this supernatural event. Consider how the eleven apostles reacted to the women’s report of the empty tomb and the vision of angels. Understandably they thought it was idle talk. Nevertheless, Peter and John were curious enough to check what the women had reported and they both ran to the tomb to ascertain what had happened.

Luke tells us that the women who arrived at the tomb and ‘found not the body’ were ‘perplexed’. This is an interesting word, which means ‘to have no way out’, i.e. be at a loss (mentally)’ (Strong’s *Greek Dictionary of The New Testament*). They could not compute what had happened. Their perplexed reaction indicates that finding an empty tomb was completely unexpected. As the women bowed (slanted) their faces to the ground, puzzled by the divested grave clothes lying on the ground, the angels began to explain what had happened: ‘Why seek ye the living among the dead?’—literally, ‘Why seek ye Him that liveth among the dead ones?’ (Luke 24:5 RVM). The angels then reminded the women how Jesus had previously spoken to His disciples about being crucified and on the third day rising again. Luke brings the reality of Jesus’ resurrection before his readers by recording the transformational change in the women’s demeanour. With profound simplicity Luke portrays the reaction of the women, ‘And they remembered his words, and returned from the tomb, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest’ (24:8 9).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: Matthew 28:2 records the angel rolling away the stone from the tomb. Here ‘angel’ is Greek *aggelos* or ‘messenger’. Mark 16:1 8 tells us that it was

a 'young man' (Gk. *neaniskos*) who spoke to the women, while John 20:12 speaks of two angels (*aggeloi*) sitting inside the tomb. Luke records that it was 'two men' (Gk. *aner*) who stood by the women and revealed to them the resurrection of the Lord. Again, when Luke speaks of two men appearing to the disciples in Acts 1:10 he uses *aner* and repeats this in Acts 10:30 as Cornelius describes his vision, even though the messengers, who were sent to Peter, describe the vision as being of an angel (*aggelos*) (v.22).

Hebrews 1:7,14 says: 'Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire" ... Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?' (ESV). All references here are *aggelos*. What are we to learn from these scriptures? It would seem that angels can assume the form of men, depending upon what service they are commissioned to perform, which would help to explain in a little measure Hebrews 13:2: 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares'; and would also help us with 2 Corinthians 11:14: 'And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light' where 'disguises' is 'to transform self' (Strong).

Whatever their purpose in service, one thing becomes very clear—that those angels sent by God unerringly point the listener/witness to God and His work through Christ. Yet these visions of angels are not to be regarded as essential for believers, for Luke is careful to tell us that when in Emmaus the disciples recognised Jesus He disappeared from their sight. Faith in God is not to be based upon sight but upon a firm unshakeable trust in God and His promises as revealed in the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit. Luke also tells us of the glorious use of scripture as the Lord Jesus explains His work in salvation, and in opening the disciples' minds to understand the importance of taking on board what had been written in former times. Such is for our instruction (Rom. 15:4). The disciples must have wondered greatly at the fulfilment of prophecy since they had understanding of God's word, and seeing it unfold in all that the Lord Jesus had said and done in His lifetime, death and resurrection.

The word of God is essential for our spiritual welfare as we see illustrated in Psalm 19:7-11. It is essential for our defence (Eph. 6:10-20); and for our service (Rom. 6:17-18; Jude 3; 2 Tim. 1:13).

Edwin Stanley

From Buckhaven: *Equipped as the Lord's witnesses* 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from

Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of these things' (Luke 24:46-48 RV). Such was the Lord's power to draw men that 'they left their nets, and followed him'. For three and a half years they had the privilege of first hand acquaintance with the Son of God, who walked with them and led them as Son of Man, patiently working with them and teaching them, so that when these so called 'ignorant and unlearned men' were brought before Israel's elite—the rulers, elders and scribes' of Acts 4, it is recorded: 'they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus' (Acts 4:13).

It was abundantly evident that they had been 'eyewitnesses of his majesty' (2 Pet. 1:16) and had been transformed from 'scattered, frightened sheep' at the cross—who did not understand how or why their Master and Lord, the promised Messiah, should be 'cut off and have nothing' (Dan. 9:26)—into bold and fearless preachers of Christ, prepared to lay down their lives in the service of their risen Lord, whom they now proclaimed as the Saviour of sinners. This transformation did not happen overnight!

After His resurrection the Lord Jesus 'opened ... their mind, that they might understand the scriptures' (Luke 24:45) and for forty wonderful days He carefully taught them 'the things concerning the kingdom of God' (Acts 1:3). Everything now fell into place.

The Lord's teaching to His 'little flock' now made sense of those things that before His death and resurrection had been an impossible puzzle. It must have come as a glorious revelation that this 'gospel of the kingdom' was not for Jews only but for the whole world: for their Lord's command was that the gospel of His kingdom, where His rule and authority would be carried out on earth, was to be 'preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations' (Mat. 24:14) [Comment 1].

Then on the day of Pentecost they were endued with power from on high—the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, equipping them with divine power, so that their preaching convicted and convinced their audience that God was calling them into a new covenant relationship, based, not on their keeping of the ceremonial law but on the finished, atoning work of Christ. The disciples had become apostles—the students of Christ, His ambassadors. Thus they were uniquely fitted to be His witnesses.

By God's grace and by the power of His Holy Spirit in us, we may continue to prosecute 'the great commission' in our day and generation—'till he come' (1 Cor. 11:26).

Jo Johnson

From Cromer: 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins' (1 Cor. 15:17 NIV). Luke's gospel is an account of the birth and life of Jesus. Many of the events of His life had been witnessed and talked about by the people who followed Him in the years of His ministry, and they could testify to the events that had happened. He had told His disciples that He 'must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life' (Luke 9:22). The resurrection back to His former glory would be the fulfilment of God's purposes through His Son. Many had seen His crucifixion, and to many this had signified the end of His life. No one witnessed His actual resurrection, but in chapter 24 Luke records the account of those who witnessed that He indeed had been raised from the dead.

Although Jesus had restored the dead, the women did not expect Him to be raised, and they went to the tomb expecting to find His body there. When the angels told them He was risen, the women went and told His followers, but they did not believe. The two on the road to Emmaus did not believe He would be raised from the dead. The disciples were startled and frightened when He appeared to them. Yet it had been foretold and He had instructed them as to what would happen.

What is the significance of the resurrection? It is evidence that Jesus is the Son of God: 'He was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead' (Rom. 1:4). We have forgiveness of sins: 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins' (1 Cor. 15:17). God's kingdom is ruled by a living Saviour. 'I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever' (Rev. 1:17-18) [Comment 2].

Physical death is not the end of human existence. 'Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Cor. 15:20). In raising Jesus from the grave, God reminds us of His absolute sovereignty over life and death.

David Hickling

From Derby: In Luke 1:26 Gabriel visits Mary, the kinswoman of Elizabeth, and tells her that she is highly favoured: 'The Lord is with thee,' is the reassuring word. 'Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.' We immediately thought of the condescension of God to send His Son in this way, but also what an honour for Mary the handmaid of the Lord.

The Lord's birth is announced to the shepherds: 'The glory of the Lord shone round about them, and then a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest.’ This was indeed a holy time when the Son of God was to dwell among His creatures and lay down His life for them.

Luke tells us of the Lord at the Mount of Olives and of the angel appearing and strengthening Him; Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers to mention this. In Luke's account there are many references to the fulfilment of prophecy beginning with the book of Genesis, for example 9:26, ‘Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem’ (compare with Luke 3:36: ‘the son of Shem’).

We also looked at the following connections to the books of the Old Testament. These show that the Lord without doubt was the one who was foretold through the Spirit in these prophecies:

Gen. 28:14	The seed of Jacob	Luke 3:34
Gen. 49:10	The time of His coming	Luke 2:1 7; Gal. 4:4
Gen. 49:10	The seed of Judah	Luke 3:33
Ex. 15:11	His character holiness	Luke 1:35;
Ex. 33:19	His character—merciful	Luke 1:72
2 Sam. 7:16	David's house established forever	Luke 3:31
1 Chr. 17:12-13	To reign on David's throne forever	Luke 1:32-33
Ps. 17:15	The resurrection predicted	Luke 24:6
Ps. 18:2-3	The horn of salvation	Luke 1:69-71
Ps. 22:9-10	Born the Saviour	Luke 2:7
Ps. 22:7-18	Stripped Him before the of men	Luke 23:3- 35
Ps. 31:5	‘Into Your hands I commit my spirit’	Luke 23:46
Ps. 45:7-8	Called the Christ (Messiah or Anointed)	Luke 2:11
Ps. 89:35-37	David's seed, throne, kingdom endure forever	Luke 1:32-33
Ps. 89:27	Emmanuel to be higher than earthly kings	Luke 1:32-33
Ps. 91:11-12	Identified as Messianic, used to tempt Christ	Luke 4:10-11
Ps. 118:17-18	Messiah's resurrection assured	Luke 24:5-7
Ps. 132:11	The seed of David (the fruit of his body)	Luke 1:32;
Ps. 147:3-6	The earthly ministry of Christ described	Luke 4:18
Is. 7:14	To be born of a virgin	Luke 1:34-35
Is. 9:6	A child born—humanity	Luke 1:31
Is.9:6	A Son given—deity	Luke 1:32
Is. 9:7	To establish an everlasting kingdom	Luke 1:32-33
Is. 9:7	No end to his government, throne, and peace	Luke 1:32-33
Is. 11:3	He would know their thoughts	Luke 6:8
Is. 42:6	The Light (salvation) of the Gentiles	Luke 2:32
Is. 49:6	He is salvation for Israel	Luke 2:29-32

Is. 50:3	Heaven is clothed in black at His humiliation	Luke 23:44-45
Is. 52:14	The Servant shockingly abused	Luke 18:31-34
Is. 52:15	Nations startled by message of the Servant	Luke 18:31-34
Is. 53:3a	Despised	Luke 4:28-29
Is. 53:9b	Innocent and had done no violence	Luke 23:4
Is. 53:12b	He would give up his life to save humankind	Luke 23:46
Is. 59:20	He would come to Zion as their Redeemer	Luke 2:38
Is. 61:1b	The Messiah would preach the good news	Luke 4:16-21
Ezek. 37:24-25	Descendant of David	Luke 1:31-33
Dan. 7:13 14c	His dominion would be everlasting	Luke 1:31-33
Mic. 5:2b	Ruler in Israel	Luke 1:33
Hag. 2:6 9	He would visit the second temple	Luke 2:27-32
Hag. 2:23	Descendant of Zerubbabel	Luke 3:27
Zech. 9:9d	The Messiah would bring salvation	Luke 19:10

The disciples had been with the Lord for three years, and although many things they did not understand, their eyes and hearts were opened during the forty days he Lord spoke to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Luke 24:25-32 gives us insight as to how their eyes were opened. The Lord was the teacher who spent time with His Father as in Isaiah 50:4-5 'The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of them that are taught ... he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear.' They could not have had a better teacher and the Holy Spirit was going to empower them
G.W. Conway

From Greenock: *Palm Sunday to Resurrection Sunday* It had been a strange week, beginning with the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The disciples believed it was a procession to the throne, that Jesus would be crowned King of Israel, and they would be His chief ministers. As the week progressed the mood of jubilation changed to despair. Why, the disciples wondered, was Jesus not preparing Himself for His coronation? Instead, on the night before the Passover He kept the seder meal and then instituted the feast of remembrance which was to be a memorial to Him after His death and resurrection. Not a banquet as would befit a king, but a simple feast of bread and wine which, as they would later understand, was of much more significance than the Passover seder meal. Jesus taught them many things that night but their minds and hearts were not in a condition to retain them. Then Jesus and the disciples went to dark Gethsemane (the oil press). If only they could have understood and believed the things which Jesus had taught them during His ministry and in the upper room! That night in Gethsemane He was farther away from the throne of Israel

than ever. Had they not left all—families, homes, occupations ... following Him faithfully to this point where they knew not what was going to happen to their Lord, or to them? Their Lord and Master, whom they acknowledged as their Messiah, lay prostrate on the ground, a helpless suppliant, alone in His depthless grief and sorrow. The disciples were too taken up with their own shattered hopes to be concerned with the Lord in His distress. What could they have done anyway? They dare not intrude into His mental anguish and physical weakness.

Where was His almighty power that had calmed the raging sea, healed all who came to Him, raised the dead, and performed so many other miracles? They might as well find solace in sleep to escape the reality before them. When armed bands came to take Him He didn't resist arrest and they made only one attempt to defend Him. Jesus was taken to be tried before the Sanhedrin, before Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate and Herod. He let them do whatever was in their minds to do—mocking, scourging, crucifying Him. The world was represented at Calvary, but He suffered and died alone. At the end He voluntarily yielded up His spirit to His Father.

When Jesus died the veil of the Temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom, there was an earthquake and the rocks were sundered (Mat. 27:51), and another earthquake followed on resurrection morning (Mat. 28:2). What did it take to convince the religious leaders that the supernatural convulsions that day were God's judgement? In their spiritual blindness they didn't see that they were connected with their rejection of Jesus of Nazareth. Would the disciples have left all to follow Jesus if they had known that His throne would be a cross, and His crown would be of thorns? With their Lord and Master dead, normal life was suspended.

Mary asked to take away His body. Her great love for the Lord would have given her the strength to attempt the impossible. The 'gardener' spoke her name, 'Mary', and she knew that it was her Lord. She would have clung to the Lord and would never have let Him go if she had had her way; but the Lord gave her the honour of the first mission after His resurrection, 'Go, tell My disciples'. Then, after the space of forty days, during which the Lord intermittently met with His disciples, they would learn and know and rejoice that the Lord had to suffer before He entered into His glory (Luke 24:26) as they also would have to do. But the glory for which they had instantly craved in Passover week was for another time, and it will be theirs when they sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mat. 19:28), and their names will be inscribed forever on the foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).

John Peddie

From Halifax: *He is risen* The women who had followed Him from Galilee watched where Joseph laid the body of their Lord. Having prepared spices and ointments to anoint Him (see Mark 16:1), they rested during the sabbath day (Luke 23:55-56). Very early on the first day of the week (24:1) they brought with them the spices, and accompanied by others they came to the tomb—the empty tomb! Luke records (v. 4) that these dear women were perplexed at this. Then, two men in ‘dazzling apparel’ (RV) stood by them. ‘He is not here’, they said, ‘but is risen’ (v.6). The apostles thought the women’s report to be ‘idle talk’ (v. 11), ‘an incredible story’. Yet, Peter went out, running to the tomb to see for himself.

A burning heart On their way home to Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion were joined by the risen Lord. As they were talking over all that had happened, Jesus drew near (v. 15). Seeing their slowness of heart to believe, Jesus said, ‘O foolish men’ (v. 25) [Comment 3]. Jesus would never have called those sorrowful disciples fools in the ordinary sense. Albert Barnes says: ‘It was not an expression of ‘contempt’; it was an expression denoting merely that they were ‘thoughtless’ and that they had not properly ‘attended to’ the evidence that He must die and rise again.’ Or, as R. F. Weymouth puts it, ‘O dull witted men’. Having recognized that it was Jesus who had been with them, they returned to Jerusalem sharing in the joy of a ‘burning heart’ (v.32). The KJV does not represent the graphic imperfections here, placing their words in the past tense. The Revisers correctly translate, ‘Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?’ They were speaking of something which was in progress. Do not our hearts burn within us as we consider our Lord’s death and resurrection? (See Ps. 39:3; cp. Jer. 20:9.)

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): The angels attended the ministry of the Lord because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the first of its kind. So, the angels must be involved to authenticate and validate the good news. Despite this the disciples were confused and this was displayed on their way to Emmaus. Since angels are not visible commonly to people here on earth, their appearance authenticated the resurrection.

An angel was sent to Mary before the Lord’s conception (Luke 1:26-31), and also to Joseph, and to the two women at the tomb. Luke 24:8 records that ‘they remembered’. Furthermore, who else could have challenged the soldiers if not the angels of God? Who else could have removed the stone?

What significance does Luke give to the fulfilment of prophecy throughout his book?
(1) The Scriptures must be fulfilled, from Genesis to Malachi.

- (2) To show that God is omnipotent and omniscient, He cannot make mistakes and He is able to do all things.
- (3) The Lord Jesus Christ is the completion and fulfilment of the Scriptures and without Him God's will would not be totally fulfilled.
- (4). Jesus' death and resurrection are ordained by God
- (5). Luke shows us the truth written about the Lord that has already been fulfilled.

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: Briefly the disciples were equipped to be the Lord's witnesses:

- (1) by having been present during the Lord's ministry, from the days of John the Baptist, to His suffering and resurrection (see Acts 1:21-23); real experiences supplemented by:
 - (2) the Lord's teaching ministry concerning the kingdom of God for 40 days after the resurrection (Luke 24:27; Acts 1:3); instruction supplemented by:
 - (3) a spiritual awakening, so that the truth He taught would be understood (Luke 24:32,45), the Greek word (ITALS>dianoignumi) for 'opened' here meaning to open thoroughly or completely, illustrated physically in Mark 7:34 and spiritually in Acts 16:14; an 'eye opening' supplemented by:
 - (4) the presence of the Holy Spirit, whose role would include teaching and reminding them what the Lord Himself had taught (John 14:26), and giving them what they were to speak (Luke 12:11-12). The dependence on this last aspect explains why, after their return from Galilee (Mat. 28:10,16) they were to wait in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49) until Pentecost, rather than immediately start preaching.

This equipping requirement is likewise met today in the children of God, who can testify to their own salvation experience, relying on the sufficiency of the Spirit inspired written word of God and the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ.

Luke's records of angels While, e.g. Psalms 34:7 and 91:11-12 indicate angelic presence may be constant around us, visible confirmations are infrequent in the Bible record. When their appearance is recorded it is usually as men, never as women or children, and perhaps this emphasizes their place in God's order. They had a role in the inauguration of the Old Covenant (Acts 7:53; see also Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2), so it was appropriate that their manifestation also occurred when God prepared for the New Covenant administration, and especially with respect to the ministry of the Messiah. Luke records that an angel had a prominent place in the outworking of the preparation for the Lord's messenger, John (Luke 1:11-20). Angels attended the Lord's incarnation (Luke 1:26-38; 2:9-15), were referenced in His sufferings and supported Him in the Garden (Luke 22:43; see also Mat. 26:53). They were involved

when Christ was raised, by enabling people to see the empty tomb and testifying to His resurrection (Luke 24:4-7,23). Luke also notes that they gave assurance of His return when He ascended (Luke 9:26; Acts 1:10-11) and makes further mention of them in Acts 5:19; repeatedly in Acts 7, then in Acts 8:26; 10:3f. and 11:7; 12:7f.; 27:23. Luke also notes the Lord's mention of angels in their heavenly sphere in Luke 12:8-9; 15:10, and their involvement in taking Lazarus to his rest (Luke 16:22).

Evidently a major sect of the Jews denied the reality of angels (Acts 23:8), and therefore Luke, like Matthew, would know any mention of them would likely put such people off. But, directed by the Holy Spirit, they both made twenty or so confident assertions about them. Theophilus, and subsequent Gospel readers, needed to realize that God had put His stamp on key events by sending His messengers—spirits sent for the sake of those who inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14). More can be learned in context by reference to the angels' designations. Luke records in certain instances: 'angel of the Lord'; 'Gabriel', 'holy angels', 'angels of God'.

Geoff Hydon

From Okorikpehre: *Disciples equipped to witness* The Holy Spirit equipped and empowered different people for service in Old Testament times. While the Spirit 'came upon' them for a limited time, from the day of Pentecost He indwells the believer forever (John 14:16-17) [Comment 4]. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus, along with the accompanying revelation of Himself (Acts. 1:3) and the commissioning with assurance of His presence (Mat. 28:18-20), together with the giving of the Holy Spirit—all these gave the needed verve and vitality to their uncommon, bold witness.

A new kind of fruit In Old Testament days Israel celebrated 'the Feast of Weeks' [Pentecost] on the 50th day (after the feast of firstfruits—*Eds.*) to mark the beginning of the grain harvest (Lev. 23:15-22). The day of Pentecost in the New Testament was a turning point. It was the commencement of a new era in God's timetable. It marked the start of a different kind of harvest—the firstfruits of the Church the Body (and following this the establishment of Churches of God—*Eds.*), Over three thousand were snatched from the enemy stronghold in one day and brought into God's service!

A new kind of power The Holy Spirit was at work among the disciples before Pentecost (John 7:37-39; 14:17). At Pentecost and beyond, however, He came with power in greater measure just as promised (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). The effect of this promise and a blessing on the Ascension Day was that they 'returned to Jerusalem with great joy' (Luke 24:52 NIV). It provided the stimulus for the post resurrection

ministry of the early disciples such that 'with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus' (Acts 4:33).

A new kind of boldness The discussion of the two disciples on the Emmaus road gives the general mood after the crucifixion. They despaired even to forgetting the resurrection promise (John 20:19). Peter, out of fear, had denied the Lord three times to his shame. We now see a different Peter and also apostles with an unconquerable sense of power and boldness that was evident to everyone. At their defence of the healing of the cripple, the rulers and elders of the people 'saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, and ordinary men' (Acts 4:13). These 'commoners', having no formal knowledge of theology except what they picked up in synagogue instruction, were equipped by the Spirit of God to witness without fear, refusing to be silenced and choosing rather 'to obey God than men' (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

A new perception of death The impact of the Lord's resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost were such that it changed the way the disciples saw pain, persecution and death. When Paul was warned by the prophet Agabus, and others, of the danger in his journey to Jerusalem, his reply was profound: 'I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts 21:13). Years later Paul encouraged Christians not to 'grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope' (1 Thes. 4:13). Dying to be with Christ was far better for him than living (Phil. 1:21).

Richard Owotorufa, Lawrence Onyokoko

From Ravulapalem: The theme of fulfilment of prophecy occurs throughout Luke's book from chapter 1:78-79. (the fulfilment of Isaiah 9:1-2) to chapter 24:43-49. 'No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:20-21 AV; 3:2; Heb. 1:1-2). 'Blessed are those who read, hear and keep the words of this prophecy' (Rev. 1:3).

The first Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Luke 3:4-6 from Isaiah 40:3-5 was delivered by John the Baptist. As Jesus was given opportunity to read Scripture in the synagogue on the sabbath day, He told them that the opening of Isaiah 61 was fulfilled through Him on that day (4:17-21). People in the Temple were scolded by Him, remembering the temple was called a house of prayer, as fulfilment of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. He told them it was written that the stone which was rejected by the builders was become the head of the corner (20:17, from Ps. 118:22).

Lastly, as the disciples expressed exclamation and doubtfulness of His resurrection He scolded them as slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken (Luke 24:24-26). He explained everything that was said about Him through Moses and others. Then the hearts of them burned, and their eyes were opened spiritually. Later, when these things written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and in the Psalms were explained, there was 'open heart surgery' spiritually (vv.44-48). Luke being a doctor, used his medical knowledge and wrote these matters of prophecy.

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *The fulfilment of prophecy* The exuberant declaration of the angels to the entourage at the tomb: 'He is not here, but has risen' (Luke 24:6 NKJV) was the culmination of the efforts of the good Dr Luke to catalogue the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. It was not the writing of a mere scribbler or a dispassionate historian outlining the cold, hard facts. Rather, it was the reverent narrative of a passionate believer thrilled at the certainty of the Messianic prophecies: 'Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account' (Luke 1:1 4).

The fulfilment of the prophecies was crucial, not only validating Jesus' claim to be the Messiah but also strengthening the believers in their faith. 'God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?' (Num. 23:19). Indeed, always, God will make good the prophecies concerning His Son: 'I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled' (Jer. 1:12 NIV), and ' "Thus says the Lord God: 'None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done,' says the Lord God"' (Ezek. 12:28). Through Isaiah He declared: 'So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it' (Is. 55:11).

Perhaps being a Gentile believer might have given Luke added incentive, which sees him tracing the genealogy of the Lord to Adam: 'the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God' (Luke 3:38). His passion at seeing prophecies fulfilled as a confirmation of God's faithfulness is seen in the narrative about Simeon: 'And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ' (Luke 2:25-26).

Nothing can compare, in tracing the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the Lord, to His risen declarations, first to the bewildered disciples on the road to Emmaus: 'Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!' And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself'" (Luke 24:26-27). And the summation of all prophecies: 'Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day"' (v.46). This no doubt was the crowning glory of Luke's gospel, and well it should be ours also.

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Buckhaven): The 'gospel of the kingdom' in Matthew 24:14 is different in context from the gospel of the kingdom in Matthew 4:23; 9:35 et al., which was preached by the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 24 the period of time is after the present 'day of grace', that is after the Lord's coming to the air, the 'beginning of travail' (24:8) and the requirement will not only be to believe on the coming Prince and Saviour, but to 'endure to the end' (v. 13). The preachers initially will be the 144,000 Jews of Revelation 7:4-8 who will go throughout the world with this message that will necessitate faith and works, i.e. believing in the one who is coming to reign and refusing to capitulate to the demands of the beast to worship him and his image, and receive the mark of 666, either on the forehead or the hand (Rev. 13:16-18; 14:9-12; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). The Lord's words in Matthew 10:18-23 and Mark 13:10-13 also contain aspects of future fulfilment of those tribulation days prior to His coming as Son of Man. Even the elect shall be put to the utmost test with the conditions on earth that will then prevail (Mat. 24:22).

R.B.F.

See also 'The Gospel of the Gospels', B.S. 1959, pp.20-22, 36-37.

M.A.

2. (Cromer): As 'the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep', the Lord's resurrection is also the guarantee of ours: 'Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ' (1 Cor. 15:20-23 ESV).

J.T.N.

3. (Halifax): We cannot be sure these were two men, of course, as 'men' is not in the original. It is literally 'O fools' (Gk. *anoetos*, meaning basically in today's parlance

'not thinking right'). More than likely it would be a married couple.

4. (Okorikpehre): It is not certain that the Holy Spirit will indwell us throughout eternity. The preposition in John 14:16 is *meta* (with; alongside) not *en* (in), implying that He will assuredly have a wonderful role to fulfil in every believer's life eternal which will not necessarily involve taking residence in the believer as He does today at the moment of conversion.

R.B.F.

Question . . .

Luke 24:46 says: 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead'. In which Old Testament passages is it written that resurrection is to be on the third day?

Suggested answer:

Of course the Lord had Himself repeatedly made this statement (e.g. Luke 18:33; 24:46 and see John 2:19), and His spoken words never pass away (Luke 21:33) and have the same force as written Scripture. And in fulfilling His own words He fulfilled what He foreknew was to stand written about Him. The perfect tense 'it is written' implies an ongoing result of a completed action, as also in 'It is finished' (John 19:22,30). Things already 'written in heaven' (Luke 10:20 and see Ps.139:16; Rev.13:8) may only subsequently be revealed on earth (consider Ps. 40:7 applied to the Lord in Heb.10:7, where the 'scroll of the book' may refer in His case not just to the Old Testament but to a higher heavenly reality). However, the Lord's hearers when Luke 24:46 was spoken would likely have thought He was referencing the written Scriptures in the scrolls known to them.

In Luke 24:44-45 we see the Lord revealing what Old Covenant scriptures meant concerning Himself. This would have brought new light to the disciples as they realized the meaning of examples, types and shadows, as well as explicit statements (see 1 Cor.10:11; Heb.8:5). So, for instance, the Lord could have explained the fuller meaning of the interpretations of Joseph's dream (Gen. 40), and shown how the exaltation of the cupbearer after three days foreshadowed His own resurrection on the third day. That 'third day' explanation may be supposition, but in the case of Jonah's experience we know unequivocally that the Lord had already shown how this

portrayed His third day resurrection from the heart of the earth (Mat.12:40; Luke 11:30), thus possibly satisfying a concern to find a Scripture for this.

Geoff Hydon

. . . and Answer

The fact that the Lord Himself referenced Jonah's experience validates scriptural prophecy of the third day being the day of His resurrection. We have to exercise care in not over spiritualising scripture while looking for prophetic indications or fulfilments. For instance, Hosea 6:2 has been quoted at times in support of the third day signifying revival and resurrection and therefore applicable to the time of the Lord's rising from the dead, which is stretching spiritual application and interpretation.

R.B.F.

From the Mail box

Reply to Comment 2 (Buckhaven)—October issue

Further to the question posed in the comment: 'How are we to interpret [the Lord's] words in Luke 22:35-38?' I would like to offer the following thoughts.

"... he that hath none, let him sell his cloke, and buy a sword. For I say unto you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in me, And he was reckoned with transgressors: for that which concerneth me hath fulfillment. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough" (Luke 22:35-38 RV).

"The "two swords" were enough, and more than enough, for Him who did not mean them to use the swords at all" (C. Ellicott). The experience of the disciples during their evangelical expedition in Luke 9, must indeed have 'strengthened their resolve' to trust in their Lord's protection and provision. And, since the Lord would never contradict Himself, we are agreed that He did not mean the disciples to 'take the sword' in His defence or their own. However, When, however, Peter drew his sword and cut off Malchus' ear, Peter put himself in the position of a transgressor in the eyes of the law. This was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 53:12), which the Lord alluded to in Luke 22:37. The fact, however, that Peter was instrumental in the fulfilment of this scripture in no way justified his actions and Peter was later at pains to acknowledge this, as has already been noted.

Jo Johnson, Buckhaven