

## George Philip Bible Readings Book of Luke

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## **1:1-4.**

The author of the third Gospel is Luke, beloved doctor and companion of Paul (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11). He was a cultured Gentile, competent and accurate in detail, and he wrote for the Gentiles, giving (with the Acts of the Apostles) a two-volume record of Christianity in its historical beginnings. It would appear that he wrote after the end of the persecution of the Christians by Nero (A.D. 64-65), but the date of writing is often given as late as A.D. 80 or even later. All these technical matters, including the relationship of this account to Mark's (the earliest of the Gospels) and Matthew's, can be studied in the appropriate reference books. We point simply to the need Luke felt to write such a detailed history of Christ right from the beginning (3-4). Upwards of thirty years had passed since the Cross and Resurrection and the first outward movement of the Gospel throughout the world. Until now the truth had been communicated orally, but such oral traditions can be distorted and misunderstood (Matt.15:3-6; Mark 7:5-9), not least by the pagan, unbelieving world, and it is for this reason that Luke marshals his material and presents it in sequence, having first checked his sources and verified his facts from eyewitnesses. The great emphasis Luke makes is that this whole Gospel is historical, and it is the things vital for faith that he records in his story. Running right through is the theme of God's activity in history, working out in Christ His divine plan and purpose (Acts 2:22-24). Right from the start it is a story that thrills.

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## **1:1-4**

This introduction, so carefully worded, is meant by Luke to counter the suspicion current then and now that there is something intellectually, historically and factually doubtful about the Christian message. His concern all along is to bring critics and enquirers to facts which have been verified. This is the substance of the first Pentecostal sermon (Acts 2:14-36), where it produced conviction and repentance. But the result can also be the exasperation and refusal of unbelief. This means we must be quite sure that our faith is grounded in facts which can be verified. This thing was not done in a corner (Acts 26:22-27); it is verified by historical testimony and both confirmed and interpreted by Old Testament Scripture. And Luke, through his association with Paul and the leaders of the early church (Acts 21:17-18), and through his lengthy stay in and around Jerusalem, was in a position to gather, verify and arrange his material by consultation with the vast number of witnesses of the earthly life of our Lord (1 Cor. 15:1-7). What he writes is a narrative of 'things most surely believed' (v.1 A.V.) as they were told him by first hand witnesses. He vouches for the accuracy of this story as only a man can who has worked hard and long at his material. At the same time he was a man who believed he was indeed dealing with the good tidings of God which alone could answer the crying need of the world. We need to feel the same if ever we are going to be evangelists of the Gospel.

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## **1:5-7**

We are at once anchored in history, and what history! Grim as it is, it is placed against the backcloth of the working of the living God. Although a Gentile, Luke sees history as the Jews saw it, not a mere recital of what happened, when, where and to whom, but these things in relation to the God who governs them. God is the God of history, working out His designs of redemption all along the line (Ex. 20:2). Superimposed on the human stage of events there is the divine counterpart of purpose and direction and power, and what brings the two together here in actual performance is the faith of a Jewish husband and wife in a day when faith had virtually died out. Here we find history mingled with theology, for the whole context of the stories which follow is the Old Testament promise of the Messiah (Lk. 24:24-27, 44-48) 'These chapters (Lk. 1-2) are prophetic also because they epitomize the spirit of expectancy which pervades the whole of the Old Testament. Here in a few picturesque episodes we are reminded of the prophet's faith in the divine control of history, of the priests daily yearning for the nearer presence of God, of the Nazarite's dedication to utter purity, of the hopes for a kingdom of justice and peace that had collected around the name of David, and of the patient loyalty of humble folk who were waiting for the redemption of Israel. By an allusive use of O.T. language Luke makes us aware, behind Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna, of a host of Old Testament figures who lived by faith in God's promises and died without seeing the fulfilment of them'. (Caird)

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### **1:5-7**

The reference to Herod, together with similar historical datings in Lk. 2:1-2 and 3:1-2, gives a grim picture of the worldly antichrist spirit of the days Luke is speaking about. Herod, a man who died unmourned by his own family and hated by the Jews, was relentless in his cruelty, lust and ambition. He built the Jews their magnificent Temple but polluted the whole land with pagan temples and practices. It was a dark and calamitous time for the Jewish nation, made worse by the fact that religion had degenerated into lifeless ritual. The last prophetic visitation from God had been some four hundred years previously through Malachi. The message of that prophet had great and thrilling promise (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6) but hope had faded almost totally. Still, God had His 'remnant of faith', weak, uncertain and suffering but still faith, and it is on this pitifully small remnant that God fixes His hopes and moves forward His purposes when His time was ready. God is never dependent on a dead ecclesiastical machine which has long since abandoned its heritage and faith. This man and wife were old, their hopes of a child had been denied. There seemed little left for them in this world, and even this once-in-a-lifetime privilege of ministering in the Temple might have been an occasion of wistful hurt rather than of glad hope. But in spite of human soreness these two walked in grace, when grace was almost extinct, and lived righteously before God when morality was unpopular. Then when God's time came, when king, temple, priests and people had fallen by the wayside, God had two servants waiting and ready for His working. How wonderful! I wonder how many people despised the old pair and thought them 'past it.' People can be very wrong.

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### **1:7-13**

Here is a married couple whose personal, human disappointment had not been allowed to embitter their spirits. It appears rather that they had grown in grace and stature through the denial of their human hopes, and it is most unlikely that God would have manifested Himself in the Temple to the man in this way had there not been the same kind of worship and devotion in the couple's home. We cannot expect to rise to spiritual heights of service in God's House if at other times we are shallow and casual. Life cannot be compartmentalised in this way. At the same time we can be sure that over this high day in Zechariah's spiritual experience there lay the shadow of personal sorrow which, in this case, served to make more intensely real the service of worship he was engaged in as he burned the incense. Outside the holy place the people were gathered for one of the three seasons of daily prayer, and when they saw the cloud of incense rising they would bow to the ground in silent prayer. It was at this moment, out of sight of the people, that a momentous message from heaven was communicated. One can understand the man's immediate sense of fear for it is not an easy thing to be in the presence of visible glory. But the angel spoke comforting words that, in the first instance, were in relation to the priest's human hopes rather than to his spiritual desires for Israel. This godly man was to play a significant part in God's plans but he lived with a deep sense of the reproach of God on him, because to be childless had that significance to a Jew. To have a sense of divine judgment added to your personal sorrow, when in fact there is no such divine displeasure, is surely Devil's work.

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### **1:14-17**

These words, so readily understandable to a man taught in the Old Testament Scriptures, conveyed to Zechariah just how extensive were God's thoughts about him and God's intentions through him. Consider 1 Cor. 2:9-10; Isa. 64:1-12 (which Zechariah would know well and perhaps link with Ps. 126) and Heb. 11:39-40. What a surge of hope must have filled the man's heart as he became aware of the seemingly impossible breaking into his experience. We will see tomorrow how the Devil instantly countered this thrill of faith with a surge of unbelief. But here we must capture the sense of God moving to significant action after years of waiting. Zechariah, whose prayers in the temple had been for the redemption of Israel, must have gasped at the realisation that God really had meant what He had said in the prophetic Scriptures. The significant prophet was to come who would prepare the way of the Lord and call the people to repentance. From the moment of his conception this promised child was to be separated unto God and his significant career was already marked out.

This is something we must consciously consider in relation to our responsibility for our own children and those in the fellowship. Who can tell what part they will yet play in the holy purposes of God? Already some of us are living, working and praying for the sake of the next generation, and we must be faithful for the sake of what is to come even if we ourselves see little or no fruit from our service. We are told that the name Zechariah means that 'God remembers', Elizabeth means 'My God is an oath', that is, an absolutely faithful God, and John means 'God's gift of grace'. There is enough here to think of for many days.

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### **1:14-17**

Before considering the priest's reaction of unbelief, think of the massive content of this angelic message. The advent of John, a prophet sent from God, would be a joy far exceeding mere personal family thrill. Think of how a barren community of hungry souls would thrill to the coming of a God-given ministry. But such a ministry of significance and spiritual power needs a work of preparation. That is why God's man has to be chosen right from the start, not as an afterthought, and why he must be a man living unto God and not subject to or conditioned by men. Never forget that John the Baptist, coming and preaching in the spirit and power of Elijah, was a lonely man, and it was in the wilderness that God spoke to him (3:2-3). His ministry was to be one of calling the people to repentance, and the strength of his ministry would not be falsely stimulated by any human agency or capacity, but inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was this authentic anointing that made the man such a preacher of moral righteousness. This was the mark of John's ministry rather than any histrionic demonstrative language. In the middle of v.17 we have more than a reference to the harmonising of families through the abandoning of sins. It seems rather a reference to John's bringing of the present generation of God's people into spiritual harmony with previous generations of faith, so making clear again the essential unity of God's working from beginning to end. But if John has to be prepared himself, his ministry is also one of preparation to make a people ready for the coming of the Lord, a people who will be spiritually alert, expectant and receptive. Be ready, for God is always desiring to work.

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### **1:18-25**

In considering the Zechariah's reaction of unbelief keep in mind his wife's testimony in v.25. Their essential godliness and consecration had been totally misunderstood by their associates. How hard that must have been to bear. Now note how God, through the angel Gabriel, deals with this man of faith and unbelief. When he feared (12-13) he was reassured, because the reaction was human and predictable. But when he doubted he was rebuked and a temporary judgment fell on him because he was not prepared to believe what God had spoken. Unbelief is not weakness but sin (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 3:12-13). Furthermore, to require from God a sign to confirm His speech is a mark of doubt rather than trust, and it was a perennial mark of the Jews' attitude (Lk. 11:16, 29; John 2:18; 6:30-31; 1 Cor. 1:22). Of course, like all of us, the man felt his doubts were justified and declared 'I am old' as if this automatically rendered God incompetent. God knew the man was old, and no doubt deliberately chose him in his old age so that the wonderful work He was about to do would be manifestly of God and not of man. We may reverently imagine the look of astonished, humorous seriousness on Gabriel's face as he answers the man's 'I am old' saying 'I am Gabriel.' The spiritually greater and better informed rebukes the foolishness of human doubt. When God purposes to work, His power is never lacking to perform. Now Zechariah should have known from his Old Testament studies in the life of Abraham, that God could well give a son miraculously (Gen. 18:1,9-15). The same was true of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:1-20). Of course God sometimes comes down to the level of human weakness and grants a sign, as He did to both Mary and Joseph. But here rebuke was needed and given, because that attitude which demands certainty, leaving no room for true and legitimate doubt, in fact excludes the possibility of faith.

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### **1:18-25**

Zechariah is left in no doubt that he had in measure despised the great privilege given him in receiving a visitation from that angel who stands in the very presence of God. In his spiritual worship and service he should have recognised at once the authenticity of this revelation. Yet God did give him a sign, although not of the kind



he expected, and for nine months this godly man had no speech, but could still ponder and pray and watch the increasing evidence of God's working. Now, while this interview with the angel was taking place the people outside were waiting and wondering about the delay and perhaps, with our human capacity for thinking the worst on every possible occasion, beginning to assume that the priest had been struck down in some judgment of God. But something far greater than judgment was being set in motion. Having come forth from the holy place the priest should have pronounced the Aaronic blessing found in Num. 6:24-26, but he could only beckon to them in some agitated manner. They knew then that something had happened in relation to God but they could not be told, and it seems fair to assume that they continued their religious exercises and went home, perhaps chatting a little about the strange experience of the priest and then dismissing it from their minds. When we read that Elizabeth hid herself for the first half of her pregnancy, we must understand that having been told by her husband in writing about the angelic visitation, she not only wanted privacy to wonder and worship at what God was doing and to give thanks, but she also saw the desire of God to keep this amazing development secret from the eyes and ears of unbelief. People would not have believed her and the work of God would have been despised, and that is no way to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord. Perhaps we all talk too much about blessing. That God is working is something which eventually can neither be hidden nor denied.

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### **1:26-33**

2If it seems wrong to divide up these passages, remember that it is often only by closer study that we realise how much we miss by being over familiar with Scripture and by assuming that we know it. Six slow, ordinary months pass after the angelic visitation and life showed no sign of a coming visitation of God. In the village of Galilee, secluded in the hills some seventy miles from Jerusalem, a young girl had just become engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Such an engagement was a real commitment and promise of mutual fidelity, and any breach of that trust was regarded as adultery according to Jewish religious law (Deut. 22:23-24). The contemporary world held Nazareth in contempt and irrelevance (John 1:45-46) and there seems to be grounds for believing the people there were of a base sort. But amongst them there was found a remnant of faith and godliness, and the story of God's significant purposes centres on one of them, a woman, naturally regarded among the Jews as weak, frail and untrustworthy for holy service. But it was to the young virgin that God's messenger came, referring to her as being 'highly favoured'. This does not mean as the Roman church says, that Mary was 'full of favour' in the sense of 'Hail, Mary, full of grace' as if Mary was able to dispense grace to others in her own right. In v.47 Mary refers to herself as one who needs and has a Saviour! The angel made it clear she was the recipient of favour or privilege in God's unconditioned choice of her to be His significant servant in the Gospel. Mary realised this and we continue the story on this basis.

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### **1:26-33**

The character of Mary, both human and spiritual, is seen in this record of the Gospel, just as the dignity, manliness and faith of Joseph is seen in Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-14, 19-23. It was into the safe keeping of a home of faith and grace that the Son of God was born. God chooses His servants wisely and well! Keep in mind from these references that the young maiden did not apparently at first tell Joseph about the angelic visit nor the message. This is readily understandable on a human level as well as in terms of God's determined purpose to keep His working as quiet and secret as possible. Mary would understand, and no doubt thrill to the intimation that God had some specific purpose for her life. But what did this detailed message mean and what would it entail? In a moment she saw clearly the threat to her love and marriage, a real threat as Matt. 1:19 makes clear. This no doubt meant more than the awareness of public shame and scorn that would ensue when the news became public. But there is no excited panic in the girl for she considered in her mind the exact significance of what was being said and indicated. The angel's words to dispel fear make it clear to her that her son is not to be an earthly Messiah to be adopted by God as His Son, but truly the Son of God. His name was to be Jesus, which means Jehovah saves (Matt. 1:21). We cannot go into all the significance of v.32-33, and content ourselves with pointing out that the words signify something and someone unique and eternal, and a work far

surpassing all human thought. That Mary was not totally shattered is a miracle almost equalling the birth itself and a token of the operating of the power of God.

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### 1:34-35

We cannot make a daily note into a theological essay on the Virgin Birth, but we must comment on it, agreeing in a sense with the I.V.P. Commentary that 'the emphasis of the narrative is not so much on the negative fact: that Mary was a virgin as upon the positive fact that her child was born of God'. But at the same time we must not miss the significance of the fact that in this mighty and magnificent start to the historical outworking of the salvation of God, man, as man, is totally laid aside. The work is of God from beginning to end. Men will philosophise until the end of time about the mechanics and logic of this happening, seeking to reconcile the divinity, humanity and sinlessness of Jesus. But it is the theology of the event that matters, and God's word about it is simply that God took the initiative and acted without the help or co-operation of man. Man is laid aside and God steps in, taking the place of man, and starts again, beginning a new humanity headed up in Christ who is the last Adam, over against the first Adam. See quite clearly that no mere creature could ever represent God or act finally for God in respect of God. God must do it Himself, and this is what He did. He came Himself in His Son. All God was, is, had to say and do became flesh and dwelt among us. 'He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all.' (C.F.Alexander), 'Lo, within a manger lies, He who built the starry skies.' (E.Caswall) Read John 1:1-14 and let your mind be humbled and your heart warmed.

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### 1:34-35

Mary's words do not express doubt as Zechariah's words did, and they receive assurance, and indeed explanation. Note that it does not say that through His conception by the Holy Spirit Jesus will become the Son of God. He is eternally God's Son (John 8:42,58; 17:5) and in His human birth He would be 'God manifest in flesh' (1 Tim. 3:16 AV). We must look at this Jesus who is born and say quite consciously that He is God, and He is man; true and perfect God, yet true and perfect man, and anything less than this falls short of the testimony of Scripture. Never think of the incarnate Son as being a mixture of God and man (which would give a creature who was neither God nor man), nor as being half God and half man. This will save us from the dangerous selectivity of declaring that at times Jesus was acting as God and at other times He acted as man. He is true and perfect God and true and perfect man, two distinct natures in the indissoluble unity of one person. The angel announces that the child to be born 'will be free from all taint of sin - He will be the Holy One. It was necessary for the Redeemer to be born of a woman (Gal. 4:4) so that He should be of the same nature as those whom He came to save. But it was just as imperative that He should be perfectly holy, since no sinful being can accomplish reconciliation for the sins of others. The angel, as God's messenger, clearly emphasises the glorious fact that both these requirements will be fulfilled in the case of Jesus.' (Geldenhuys). This is indeed Good News.

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### 1:36-38

There is a wonderfully human touch here in the angel's using the still secret pregnancy of Elizabeth as a reassurance to the young girl. If the older woman could have a miracle baby, was the young woman's case to be thought impossible? What is more, the whole plan, which is a unified work of God from the beginning, a fulfilment of His age-long promises, was already well under way and in a mere three months the fore-runner would be born. There was no time to lose. No time to dither, compromise and qualify. If Mary was to be God's willing instrument in this high moment of history she must give her answer at once. And she did. Woman, representing the weaker part or aspect of humanity, consents to the grace of God and at once the angelic element in the story disappears for a season and the girl is left in all her humanity, sweet and sensitive, with a colossal secret and expectation. Only Mary knew when this amazing work of God was actually executed, and even she would scarcely know exactly when. These delicate matters the Bible deals with in such a chaste way that we are left thinking not so much of the miracle as of the willing submission of faith on the part of Mary as she accepted the will of God, fully conscious of the difficulties and cost to her. The progress and the issue of this matter, the

reaction of Joseph, family and public, were all costly in anticipation. But with God, nothing is impossible, and Mary left it with God.

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### **1:39-45**

The human encouragement given to Mary when she was told of Elizabeth's hopes was guaranteed to send the young girl straight to the home of the still dumb priest. By comparing v.39 and v.56 we see that Mary made this journey at once, Joseph knowing nothing of her secret, and it was only after her return that the crisis recorded in Matthew 1:18 comes. No-one but Elizabeth and her husband could possibly have understood at this stage and we can imagine what it meant to Mary to have someone she could talk to safely, someone who would understand, simply because she had gone through a similar experience. There is no suggestion in the story that Mary, so signally called to holy service, was expected to be self-sufficient. The opposite is the case, for spirituality never contradicts humanity. The girl needed a mother-figure who would not jump to wrong conclusions: someone who would think in spiritual categories, and so be able to minister help and encouragement. Now it becomes apparent that in her months of waiting in quietness Elizabeth herself had been prepared by a spirit of worship in the presence of God for her first great service. It was not bearing the child John, but in ministering to the younger woman whose son Jesus was to eclipse her own child. What a triumph of grace over natural human jealousies!

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### **1:46-56**

It is the Devil who makes us jealous of another's blessing when it seems they have been more favoured than ourselves, and the issue is sometimes a spirit of competition among the children of God, which in turn leads to exaggeration which is really lying. But with Elizabeth there was no such shadow and the result was even greater joy and fresh opportunity to praise God and to take her share in the purposes of God. The reference to the blessings of faith in v.45 can refer as much to the older woman as to the younger. Faith lives to see the purposes of God unfolding gloriously and irresistibly. We are still dealing with yesterday's verses because they are the inspiration, by the Holy Spirit, of Mary's song. The unborn child in the older woman's womb is said to have rejoiced in recognition of the conception of the Messiah. It would be easy to be cynical about this even in spite of v.15, but the truth is that we simply do not understand how much a child can grasp. We are told of the deep personality influences of a baby's earliest days, but here we are taken into the realm of before actual birth. Again we are told of how a baby can be affected physically, while still in the womb, by a mother's behaviour, physical condition and circumstances. How much more could this be true in spiritual categories. We are dealing here with children who are chosen vessels for God and this is the reason why they were conceived. Life is much more than physical and perhaps the poet was right when he said, 'Not in entire forgetfulness and not in utter nakedness. But trailing clouds of glory do we come From God who is our home: Heaven lies about us in our infancy!' (Wordsworth) We usually leave it far too late to begin to pray for our children.

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### **1:46-56**

The whole of this song of praise breathes the assurance that God has already taken decisive action towards the fulfilment of His promise to send the Saviour. Note how the emphasis throughout is on God and what He has done in laying hold on a humble human life in order that His glorious purposes might be fulfilled. Mary speaks of her soul and spirit in v.46-47 and this seems to indicate that her conscious emotional experience and her essential personality are integrated in praise. Her whole being, in human capacity and spiritual response, is involved in this act of worship, praise and exultation. Some commentators see a parallel to Mary's song in that of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1-10, but while Hannah is aware of a deep personal triumph over and deliverance from her tormentors, Mary seems more aware of the far reaching issues of what God has done. This may be the reason why there is no specific mention in Mary's song of the Son promised her although the whole hymn is inspired by the fact of it. Perhaps the note we need to grasp is the emphasis that God, who has always been acting in the world on behalf of His people, is acting now and will act from generation to generation. This is why His people should trust Him even when there is little sign of His presence. Perhaps Mary and Joseph, like



Zechariah and Elizabeth, had resigned themselves to the barren spiritual situation that seemed so hopeless. It is a natural tendency and it leads to demoralisation (Prov. 13:12), which is remedied only by a reaffirmation from God that He is not inactive, let alone indifferent or dead. His ways are higher and surer than ours (Isa. 55: 8-13) and when we realise that we can scarcely contain our joy.

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### **1:57-66**

How wonderfully this story builds up in drama and excitement, and yet how many emphases there are on the slowness of progress. In some ways it is all so ordinary; the long months of waiting that could not be hurried; the fuss and excitement of relatives who, true to type, interfere in the business of naming the child; and the long silence of the child's father which was a constant reminder of and rebuke to unbelief. But there is no longer unbelief in the hearts of this father and mother. It has been replaced by a spirit of trust and absolute obedience, as is evidenced by their simple yet determined affirmation that their son would have the name declared by God months previously (v.13). This obedience of faith is put in question by custom dominated friends and relatives, and we must see in this a subtle attempt by the Devil to side-track the issue and so conceal and confuse God's working. But it does not succeed and in v.63 Zechariah makes it clear that this decision is God's and not merely of man. This seems to cause the people to be awed by an awareness that God in some way was drawing near to them and their human situation, but we cannot help wondering just how long this holy awe lasted. Certainly it seems from v.66 that the people decided to reserve their judgment and wait to see what would happen. No doubt the great song and sermon which followed from the lips of the old man would impress the people again, but unbelief is hard to shift. That is why we must guard against it. It is evil. It is always seeking to intrude where God is working.

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### **1:67-80**

When God names a man He determines what that man's character, service and destiny are to be in relation to heavenly purposes (Gen. 17:5), and it was so with John, a man sent from God (John 1:6-7, 15, 23-30). It is the awareness of this working of God that inspires Zechariah's song of praise, which has as its first theme the fact that God has visited His people for the purposes of redemption. The thought is of personal intervention; God has come on the scene, He is here in His sending of the Saviour as He had promised He would do all through the Old Testament. It would take too long to give a detailed examination of this passage in these notes, and those who would study it can trace the grandeur of the theme by looking up all the marginal references (if you have that kind of Bible). Trace in the passage the themes of salvation, deliverance, performance, promise, service, holiness, righteousness and peace. Then take the words 'tender mercy' in v.78 and see how that wonderful description of the kindness and love of God in fact permeates the whole passage. Do not think of this hymn as a spontaneous utterance but rather as the fruit of months of silence during which the priest of Israel pondered the signs and intimations of the coming work of God's salvation. Think of the thrill of our own hearts when, after a long spell of barrenness, souls begin to be saved again and people begin to manifest a hunger of heart for God and for the Gospel. The possibilities of the expansion of such a quickening sent from God are immense and we would be less than human if we did not thrill with hope. This is exactly what Zechariah did, and his thrill was translated into glorious worship.

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### **1:67-80**

Some commentators declare that there are more than four hundred clear Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament but it would be truer to say that the whole of the Old Testament points forward to and finds its fulfilment in Christ (Luke 24:27). As in the Old Testament the salvation of God is here first spoken of in political and territorial terms, but the latter verses signify that they are to be understood in spiritual and moral terms. We must guard against having too materialistic an idea of God's kingdom which is specifically declared to be 'not of this world' (John 18:36). The enemies we really need to be delivered from are sin and guilt, the world, the flesh and the Devil, and the powers of evil both within us and around us. It is a Saviour able to do this that is promised and who was about to come. But the way of salvation must be opened up in people's hearts

to make them ready for the Coming One and this is to be the ministry of John (v.76-77). It was to be a mighty ministry because by and large the people had thoughts only of a worldly, political, sociological Messiah, not One who would, as His first action, set about changing their lives by separating them from their sins. This work of Messiah is likened to the rising of the sun (Mal. 4:2; Isa. 9:1-8; 60:1-3), and Zechariah speaks of it as having been accomplished, because it has in principle begun in the birth of one child and the conception of the other. But Luke reminds us that it all takes time to work out, and we are left with the picture of the boy John growing until the time was ripe. God does not hurry. There is no need, He is so sure of the issue that He works naturally.

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## **2:1-7**

How necessary it is to discern both the prophetic and historical elements of the story. It was a reorganisation of Roman administration and the ensuing census that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, which place had long ago been prophesied as the birth-place of Messiah (Micah 5:2-4). By law there was no need for Mary to have accompanied Joseph, who was now her husband, although the marriage was not yet consummated (Matt. 1:24-25), but to save her from the obvious local criticism when the child was born some six months after her legal marriage, Joseph took her with him. Perhaps these two devout Jews were also constrained by the prophecy from Micah which they would know. What Luke seems to be emphasising is how the sovereign purpose of God was being worked out through the human circumstances of hesitancy and exuberance on the part of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the quiet faith and manly spirituality of Mary and Joseph, and the political expertise of Caesar Augustus. Even the Caesars of this world are conscripted to do the will of God. cf. Isa. 45:1 where Cyrus is the 'anointed one'. Circumstances, faith and sovereign grace, brought it all to pass, and so it was that the heavenly babe was born. And there was no room!

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## **2:1-7**

If you are tempted to feel the Christmas message is irrelevant today let your mind dwell on the words 'in those days' for they were solemn days. The world was in uneasy peace under ruthless, materialistic government that was by no means free from moral taint. The church as it then was had become cynical about its own beliefs to the point of sheer indifference, while at the same time there was a spirit of honest enquiry amongst some at least of the intellectual and cultural fraternity (Matt. 2:3-10). The 'rogues gallery' of Luke 3:1-3 speaks for itself and we find a situation that is godless. No doubt Caesar believed he ruled secularly and the Sanhedrin believed they held the reins spiritually, but when God worked He bypassed them all. His holy intentions centred on a young couple, unrecognised by all, refused accommodation by all, yet having a secret of infinite significance which they could tell to none. Can you imagine good Joseph reassuring Mary and saying, 'God will provide', and He did, but no child could have been born lower or more rejected. The warm, smelly air of the stable sufficed for the Lord of Glory. No publicity, no press conference, no reception committee of the 'best people' when Christ was made in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a Saviour. How silently God's wondrous gift was given. Shame on us for our noisy irrelevant festivities at Christmas by which we miss God because there is no room.

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## **2:8-20**

The social structure of the day, so riddled with privilege and power together with the economic strictures of taxation, conspired to make men like the shepherds creatures of time and sense, anchored to the earth, and yet it was to them rather than to the ecclesiastics with their sharp tongues and hard hearts that the message came. It came to them right where they were in the context of daily life. That they immediately reacted by leaving their sheep, risking loss if the sheep were their own or punishment if they belonged to a master, gives us ground for believing there was a real element of godly faith among them. These men by sudden illumination, like the wise men after a long pilgrimage of searching, met at the stable and we are compelled to face the fact that the Gospel message does not appeal simply to one class. The family in the stable was young, the priest and his wife were beyond middle-age, Simeon and Anna were in the old category and now intellectuals and workers join the scene. How marvellous, and how it is being repeated in our own day and generation in churches where Christ is still heralded forth in His divinity, humanity, and glorious Saviour-hood. Only the hard core of ecclesiastics is

excluded. Religion has so deadened their spirits that they have no appetite for God and in consequence no spirit of evangelism. How differently we see the others, all of them in their own way exuberant with the joy of a Saviour who has come. They go far and wide, telling the story and they cannot be stopped.

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## **2:8-20**

Consider now the angels' song, which is so misunderstood in present day celebrations of Christmas. None of the glory was visible at Bethlehem where the emphasis was on quiet lowliness, and even with the angels out on the fields the glory was seen by only a few. Like the actual resurrection, this was a hidden work, with only the heavenly participants manifesting extravagance. In Luke's account the earthly participants are portrayed with great ordinariness, and the growlings of hell through Herod and the bigoted priests are given no mention at all. But the angels, seeing at last the significance of the birth of this child (1 Pet. 1:10-12), burst out of heaven, and even although it seems a little incongruous to have a host of angels preaching to a group of shepherds, the subject matter justifies it. The words 'Glory to God' are not an appeal but rather a declaration that in the coming of Christ the zenith of God's self-revelation had been reached. Something had been done that could never be undone. It is a matter for thrill, because the hidden purpose of centuries is now out in the open. It is also a matter of peace, but not that peace which is dependent on man's good-will to his neighbour, a somewhat fictitious thing. It is peace to men with whom God is pleased (R.S.V), and without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). It is peace on earth 'for men on whom His favour rests'. It is peace for men who are the objects of God's good pleasure. The goodwill proceeds from God and is seen to be a gift of grace to be received by faith, and this highlights the hollowness of a Christless Christmas. There is no peace to the wicked unbelieving world, nor can there ever be. Where sin is, peace is absent; and sin remains until a Saviour casts it out.

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## **2:21-32**

Our reluctance to depart from the story of the Nativity may indicate an abiding disposition in human nature to concentrate on events without grasping their significance. The birth of this Holy Child is not an end in itself. He has come for a purpose and Luke seeks to hurry us on into further developments. The initial reactions were seen in yesterday's verses (17-20) where the first preaching of the coming of Christ is recorded. But it would appear firstly that the full glory of the message had not yet dawned, although people knew that God had spoken and acted in some significant way. Mary herself was retentive rather than outspoken as she pondered just what the ultimate significance of this child would be, and how His coming would fulfil all the age-long promises of God. A week of quietness elapses and then in conformity with the law of the Old Testament the child is brought to the House of God. Four times in our passage and again in v.39 emphasis is placed on the observance of the Law. Now, since Luke was writing for Gentiles, there must be some clear significance here. God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), born under the Law (Gal. 4:4) to be partaker of all our life (Heb. 2:16-18) in order to become a Saviour for all people. Here, right from the start, in order to fulfil all righteousness (cf. Matt. 3:15), He is brought under the Law and obligated to fulfil all its requirements, not for Himself but for those He came to save. The circumcision He underwent had the same significance as His later baptism, in which He was numbered with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12).

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## **2:21-32**

The Old Testament background of this ceremonial is Leviticus 12:6-8 where provision is made for poorer people to bring the lesser sacrifice of the two small birds. Along with the sacrificial element in the visit to Jerusalem there is the emphasis on the consecration of the child to the service of God, which symbolic action of faith on the part of the parents was to bear fruit perfectly in the life of this child. Some commentators point out that this visit took place before the wise men reached Jerusalem, since after the warning about Herod Joseph would never have brought the family into such danger. This seems right because after the visit of the wise men who gave rich gifts Joseph and Mary would not have offered a poor person's offering to the Lord. It is good to think like this because it reminds us that God's working does not take place all at once, with a miraculous

suddenness. It takes time, and it is seen in the action and counteraction of the affairs of men. God's timing is perfect. All the symbolic ritual in the Temple, with its theological significance in terms of redemption, and its emphasis on the unity and continuity of Old and New Testaments, was completed and only then do the wise men arrive and depart. On one level the nativity story is full of impending crisis and immediate danger (think of how the rough journey on a donkey's back and all the bustle could have precipitated the birth) yet at the same time everything is perfectly under control. Oh that we would really believe God in this way! What peace it would bring.

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### **2:21-32**

The darkest hour of the night is said to be just before the dawn and this is often true spiritually. In spite of the low spiritual state of Israel, the indifferent cynicism of religion and the harsh materialism of the day, God had His remnant of faithful people. We have read in detail of some of them and now we see a ripe saint of God, Simeon. Under the constraint of the Holy Spirit he came into the Temple at just the right moment. It is doubtful if he had heard any of the shepherds' news but there seems to have been a spiritual expectancy in his heart as he waited for 'the consolation of Israel', the coming of the Messianic age and all it meant of God's redemption of His people. The moment he saw this Babe he knew that God had fulfilled His promise, and even although the seal of certainty was a mere scrap of an infant, the issue was no longer in doubt. Like a watchman charged to watch for the rising of the bright morning star (Rev. 22:16) Simeon speaks aloud the good news, and is discharged from service. But first he declares that this child's advent heralds a salvation prepared for all people, and shines a light that will lighten the darkness of the whole world, revealing, as it does so, the glory and privilege granted to Israel in the purposes of God. Think how often the old man must have wondered what the next day or next year would hold. Think of how often the passing years would seem to confirm the failure of the promises of God and the hopelessness of going on. Think how often his faith must have been assailed, and yet he held firm because he believed God's word stood. God cannot lie. He cannot fail. He is a God to be trusted.

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### **2:33-38**

It is wonderful to see in old people like Simeon and Anna that kind of piety which is so basic that it does not fade or wither with the passing of the years but remains alive and agog with expectation. It is one thing to believe when we are surrounded with evidences of God's working, but quite a different thing to believe when everything seems to be going; from bad to worse, even though we may not be totally alone in our faith. These saints of God knew that a new era had begun, and promises of glory already tinged the dark sky of experience. But at the same time they were not beguiled into thinking that the realisation of God's promises would be without costly travail. Simeon makes it plain that no easy triumph was envisaged and that this Child would be the centre of a storm of controversy which would reveal the secret disposition of the hearts of all. So much would this Child be a significant sign that is spoken against and a stone on which men would stumble, as well as build safely, that Mary's joy would be pierced through with pain. The coming of Christ and the increasing manifestation of His word and power would mean a fall to some and a rising again to others. People bring their own judgment as a result of their own response to the Saviour (John 12:44-48; 15:22-25). But these verses also speak of a necessary falling on the part of all who will rise again, for no one truly comes to Christ until they come to an end of themselves. Death and resurrection go together, and in Christian life and service there are many deaths to die with Christ. But the same Saviour who brings us low to see our need is the One who lifts us up to be reassured in hope.

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### **2:39-52**

There is such silence in Scripture about the human growth and development of our Lord that we are apt to forget it and so lose a great deal of comfort and assurance which stem from the Biblical testimony that He was 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15; 5:1-9). All we are told of His first twelve years is in v.40. Physically and spiritually He grew under the natural laws of development save that He, unlike all others, was unimpeded by hereditary or acquired defects. Something of His early life can be guessed



at by the appearance in later life of His love of nature, His close observance of all things around Him, His love for and knowledge of the Scriptures and His essential disposition and understanding which caused the common people to hear Him gladly. When we think of His growth from boyhood to adolescence, and when we recall the dignity of both Joseph and Mary in their faith and obedience, we cannot but think of the keeping power of a truly godly home. We learn from Mark 6:3 that Jesus was one of a large family, and that He worked at the trade of a carpenter. Tradition has it that after Joseph's death Jesus took the place of the head of the house in providing for the family. If ever a man understood human life it was Jesus. That is one reason why we can go to Him with confidence.

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### **2:39-52**

The story of the Boy in the Temple with the doctors reveals the lack of full understanding on the part of Mary and Joseph. Faith, even in its acceptance of God's will and plan for life, does not necessarily know all things. After the Passover as the return journey began, many families travelling together, Joseph assumed Jesus was with Mary and the children and Mary assumed the growing boy was with the lads and men. But it is dangerous to go on assuming that Jesus is in the midst. Better to check! A day's journey passed before the discovery; a day's journey took them back to the city; and the third day they searched and found the boy. We can understand anxiety and can well understand annoyance on the part of parents, but what exactly did Mary mean by referring to Joseph as Jesus' father (48)? Had Jesus never been told the amazing facts of His birth? Like all children He must have asked and it seems incredible that evasive answers had been given. Was it the presence of the religious teachers that caused Mary (why not Joseph?) to speak guardedly? She had many thoughts she shared with no one (v.19). But the young lad is further on spiritually than Joseph and Mary and He expresses surprise that they had not known exactly where to find Him. Had they not given Him to God and should He not be in His Father's House? But it is so easy, especially with our loved children, to allow our natural love to hinder spiritual purpose. We shall see Mary doing this more than once as the story goes on. How careful we must be! How early we must discern the signs of God's hand on our children. How ready we must be to be a help and not a hindrance to God's purposes for them.

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### **3:1-2**

These verses leading on to a description of the ministry of John the Baptist form the introduction to Jesus' public ministry, and Luke deliberately and with detail portrays the terrible darkness and corruption of the time. It was a grim situation, calling for a stern and realistic word, and that message was given when the Word of the Lord came to John in the separation, isolation and moral cleanness of the wilderness. So corrupt and stultifying was the situation that only a word from outside had any hope of being heard. In giving all this accurate chronological and circumstantial information, Luke is making clear that the Gospel he writes is not just a life story of Jesus, but the record of an act of God on the stage of human history. And God acted at a very dark and grim time. Tiberius had been Caesar for 15 years, ruthless in his rule by the power of the sword, pagan in the extreme, and lusting for two things, moral indulgence and political power. Pilate, governor of Judaea for three years, was a weak man, and like most weak men was stubborn, harsh and extreme, always trying to evade the issues confronting him or else dealing with them in an extremity of action that could only exacerbate the situation. Herod, ruling over a fourth part of Galilee, had the morals of the farmyard and was as sly as a fox (Lk: 13:32). This man, son of the Herod who slew the innocents (Matt. 2:16-18), is later seen in his base notoriety in the killing of the Baptist to please his wife, whom he had no right to have because she was married to his brother (Mk. 6:14-28). Philip was another son of Herod the Great by his fifth wife, Cleopatra. He was in fact the best of the Herod family, ruling his territory in moderation and justice. He married Salome, daughter of Herodias! The city Caesarea Philippi is named after him. Little is known of Lysanias, but what we have said here makes clear the calibre of the man needed to be God's messenger in a generation like that.

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### 3:1-2

We need only to mention the names of Annas and Caiaphas to bring home the tragedy of religion in those days. Caiaphas was the official holder of the office but Annas, his father-in-law, still exercised power, hence the account in John 18:13-24 of the investigation by Annas before the official trial by Caiaphas. It was their will that ruled the house of God and not the commands of God, and there is no more ruthless power than that of ecclesiastics who have forgotten God. At this time, when few thoughts would centre on religious revival, the Word of God came to this man who was being prepared by the isolation and privation of the wilderness. The Word pressed in on him and was like a fire burning in his bones so that it had to be preached. He knew it was not his own word but God's, and this no doubt was the dynamic of his ministry. He was sent, he did not choose to go. His word was bound to enrage both secular state and religious establishment and be resented. But it was a word that was independent of both because the Spirit of God had left them. The time had come for God to speak and His messenger was ready, waiting, available and aware of the task given him. This is what John learned in the wilderness, and the reason why many do not learn thus is because they refuse the discipline of loneliness, self-denial and separation from the debilitating atmosphere of sheer worldliness. Compromised lives can preach only a qualified message.

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### 3:3-9

John's message was thoroughly biblical, based on Isaiah 40:3-5, and in no way clouded by theological terminology. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, in the sense that those coming for baptism were testifying that they had turned from their sins. In so preaching John turned the hearts of the people to seek for God's salvation, an inward, spiritual and moral salvation, as such prophecies as Zechariah 13:1 and Ezek. 36:25ff. had promised. But John makes it clear that it is by returning from crooked ways and following along the way of humiliation, repentance and confession that people will find and receive salvation. God is coming in Jesus Christ to bring near His great salvation, but we cannot reach out and take it with our hands still full of sins, and our hearts full of pride. This was the stumbling block to the Jews who, although recognising the need for the Gentiles to repent and be baptised, saw no need for themselves, as the privileged and chosen people, to do likewise. This is why John meets the people with such withering words and portrays the woodman ready with the axe to smite and cut down as if the message was judgment rather than salvation. But of course it must be both, since some would rather have their own pride than God's salvation. No one must trust in religious pedigree, for a tree is judged by its fruits and not its roots. If repentance is genuine, in the time of God's drawing near it will be evidenced by a forsaking of sin and a change of life. The simplicity of the Gospel is very devastating. That is why people often prefer the kind of religion which leaves them alone.

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### 3:10-14

A great many people would like all the blessings of Christ, Christian fellowship, and the hope and power of the Kingdom of God without conversion. They are even prepared to make a formal attachment to a God-blessed work, just as the Jews did here when they flocked out to hear John and to ask for water baptism. But a public confession linked with a spiritual sacrament has no value without a true repentance of heart and life. Hearing this, the awakened people asked what they had to do, as if some special penance or performance was required. 'To each class he (John) spelled out in simple terms the meaning of repentance. To ordinary, selfish folk, blind to the needs of others because of their preoccupation with security, to tax collectors whose trade was a form of licensed extortion, to soldiers accustomed to line their pockets by intimidation and blackmail, he gave the same injunction: renounce your besetting sin.' (G.B. Caird). Note that John does not counsel any to give up their existing occupations, but in them to show the moral repentance that signifies true saving faith. The test of our Christianity is often in the daily routine of business and pleasure, where we cannot hide, rather than in church where we can hide by outward conformity to what is expected. All this John preached as he urged the people to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. It is a contemporary message.

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### **3:15-18**

What John was challenging the people to be and do was quite beyond their human capacity and beyond John's power to give. And therefore when they began to ask questions John deliberately places himself in the background and speaks of One to come, whose baptism would be by the Holy Spirit and fire, a baptism which would accomplish inwardly what was outwardly symbolised in John's baptism by water. But this message has tones of judgment as well as salvation. 'Just as fire consumes what is destructible and thus works in a purifying and cleansing manner, so the Messiah will through the Holy Ghost consume sin and the sinners in so far as they cling to sin. In this way those who persist in sin will be destroyed, but those who sincerely confess their sins and flee to Him for refuge will be purified from sin to their own salvation, and delivered from its penalty and power.' (Geldenhuys). To put it simply, sin must be burned out of us or we will be burned out with sin. But do not let the radical solemnity of this message keep from your mind and heart that the purpose of the searching process of winnowing (17) is not to dispose of the chaff but to gather the grain. Inevitably there will be an exposing of things that differ. Chaff is not wheat and can never be. A final comment: the word used in v.18 for 'preached' is the word evangelise, which means to announce good tidings! The message was not morbid but healthy in realism.

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### **3:19-20**

A short but salutary reading. A lifeless ministry and witness will scarcely cause a ripple of reaction in society, and the church will be, as it is now, tolerated, patronised and despised. But the moment we stand in and by the truth of God and declare it with a measure of the unction and conviction of the Holy Spirit, there will be trouble, for the simple reason that men and women will resent the intrusion into their private moral and religious lives. But it is right here in church and world that we must learn to stand firmly by what is right and true and pure, and refuse to be compromised or blackmailed into silence. If you read the account of John's imprisonment given in Mark 6:14-29, linking it with Luke 9:7-9 and 23:7-12, you will see that Herod's attitude was not simple, but composed of many conflicting desires. But at the same time it was not a static attitude and from Luke's clear statement of his almost immediate reaction to the challenge of the 'good news' of repentance unto forgiveness, it is clear that Herod became harder and harder in heart and more and more trapped in his sins. In the end Jesus spoke no word to Herod, and we cannot help thinking of a man who had committed the unpardonable sin (Mk. 3:29). When he crossed the line we cannot say. How solemn!

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### **3:21-22**

The baptism of Jesus is the second of the seven major crisis points in His life and ministry: His birth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, cross, resurrection and ascension. In His baptism we have one of the three occasions when God the Father breaks His silence and speaks in clear testimony concerning Jesus. The other two occasions were at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5) and prior to the Cross in John 12:28. The significance of God's speech here is to declare beyond any doubt the divinity and eternal sonship of Jesus, and also to declare that in this Jesus, truly man and truly God, there was nothing whatever to grieve the righteous heart of the holy God. It is this sinless man who now presents Himself for the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance in respect of sins. He had no need of this baptism for Himself, as John recognised (Matt. 3:13ff) and we must see it as a mighty and significant act done for us and for all. Here is God's appointed man freely and willingly numbering Himself with the transgressors. We see this in the almost casual narrative of v.21, where Jesus comes, at the end of a long queue of candidates for baptism, to be baptised like the rest. By this time John's movement was a popular one (always dangerous and liable to reduce or obliterate the true significance) but significantly the Pharisees withheld themselves from it (Lk. 7:30), so rejecting God's purpose of grace concerning them. But Jesus came, consciously and willingly to give Himself, in this act, to the work he came to earth to do. He who is without sin takes on Himself the sin of those he now represents. This magnificent moment of dedication brought reaction from Heaven and from Hell.

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### 3:21-22

The moment of baptism was an irrevocable step for Jesus and this may explain in part at least the reference to His praying at the time. After thirty years of preparation in obscurity, during which as Luke has indicated, our Lord had some conscious knowledge of the purpose for which He was on earth (2:49), Jesus now stands committed and the great battle has begun. The glorious Representative has offered Himself to God, and the Father responds. In this opening of heaven there is given both a revelation of the glorious majesty of the Father and a confirmation of the acceptance of His son's offered sacrifice. We begin to see why the next chapter brings the Devil into the picture! Our Lord and John (John 1:32) saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending on Him. 'This does not mean that the Lord Jesus was not previously full of the Holy Ghost or that He was not conceived by the Holy Ghost, but merely indicates that He had now been equipped by the Holy Ghost with all official gifts to appear openly as Messiah and Redeemer.' (Geldenhuys). What is shown in the form of symbol is of course confirmed by the Word of God, which word here causes us to think of the infinite and eternal pleasure the Father always had and has and will have in His own Son. As in the Transfiguration so here our Lord, as a truly human man whose life had in all points pleased God and fulfilled His will, could have claimed His right as a man to enter the opened heavens and dwell with God. But He had committed Himself to be the sinners' Saviour. He had taken His place by our side and there was no going back. The Father was pleased, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son'.(John 3:16)

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### 3:23-38

'At this point Luke appends a genealogy of Jesus, by which he provided a fourfold commentary on the story of the baptism. He shows that Jesus, declared to be the Son of God, is no demigod from pagan mythology but a real man with a family tree. He substantiates Jesus' messianic claims by adducing evidence of His Davidic descent (cf. Rom. 1:3; Mk.10:48; Acts 2:30). By tracing His ancestry back to Adam, he reminds his readers that Jesus was bound by ties of kinship not only to Israel but to humanity, and that His mission was ultimately to all mankind. By calling Adam son of God he makes a link between the baptism and God's purpose in creation. Man was designed for that close filial relationship to God which was exemplified in Jesus, and which Jesus was to share with those who became His disciples.' (Caird) We are not going to study the detailed names given here, no doubt in extract from the public registers of the time, save to mention the caution needed in v.23. Joseph is the son-in-law of Heli (being in Matt. 1:16 specifically named as son of Jacob) and while in accordance with custom, both Roman and Jewish, the name of a woman is not included in the lineage, what we have here is in fact the family tree of Mary. It takes little imagination to recall from this list of names the long, sorry and sordid story of mankind in all its corruption and need. It is the long story of sin right back to the start in Adam and leaves us in no doubt as to the need of a second Adam (a last Adam, for there is no other) to replace the first and to bring to pass all God intended when He made man. What a Gospel! If any man be in Christ he is a new creation! (2 Cor.5:17)

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### 4:1-2

We have indicated that in this story of God's activity we would soon see reaction from Hell and here it is. But note carefully that the initiative is with Christ by the eternal Spirit, and we see Him now no longer a private person but a public representative of man. This is why He was at once brought into conflict with the powers of Hell. But this cannot have been the first experience our Lord had of temptation. Between His birth and baptism there were thirty years (only Luke gives this detail in 3:23) in which Jesus, subjected to the same circumstances and temptations as we are (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15), grew from innocence to holiness. It is clearly stated in Scripture that He knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21) but He knew temptation as only those know it who have met its ferocity and resisted it. Now, not for Himself but for us, Jesus advances to the battle. We understand best if we contrast the last Adam with the first Adam. Satan tempted Adam when all was in Adam's favour in the garden, there being no entail of sin in human experience, no circumstantial pressures towards evil and nothing man needed that he could not at once have for the asking. In such a garden, man made the fatal choice that brought the human race crashing down in ruin and in frustration of the purposes of God. But Jesus, God's other man, living in the real world, as we know it, with all the accumulated pressure of sin in its experience, without anything in

His life to grieve away the Spirit of God went out to challenge Satan's dominion over man. He did it in Satan's territory with everything, humanly speaking, against Him, and as a man, He overcame. Having in His own personal life, as a private individual, already conquered the wiles of the Devil, He now goes to war for us.

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#### 4:1-2

This story could only have been told by Jesus Himself and it makes certain things very clear. Whether we think of this encounter as visible and verbal or mental and spiritual the fact remains that evil is real and personal. Evil is not a mere principle or some indefinite psychological or sociological residue that can be educated or psycho-analysed away. Our Lord's experience here is not the result of inherent personality defect or of some remembrance of past experience. It came from outside Himself: His battle was not with mere flesh and blood. But it was a battle. The temptations did not arise from within Himself yet they were real temptations in that what was presented or offered registered as desirable. How else can we explain the conflict and the exhaustion? Note very clearly that the three-fold specified temptation came after the battle of the forty days when, in the apparent easing of the conflict, the natural hunger reasserted itself in the consciousness of our Lord. This is one reason why we must set a guard on our souls *after* significant and costly spiritual service. While seeming to discount the idea of a 'real' personal Devil, Caird in his commentary says this story teaches us that 'Evil is real and potent. It is not just the sum total of individual bad deeds, but a power which gets a grip on human life and society. Evil is personal. Evil is distorted good. Evil masquerades as good. The Devil is the slanderer who misleads men by telling them lies about God. Evil is the enemy. The armchair sociologist may tell us that certain deplorable types of human behaviour are 'normal' because they occur regularly in his statistical surveys; but those who love the people concerned know otherwise.'

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#### 4:3-4

If Jesus told the disciples the story of this intensely personal and costly experience, it must have been in order to teach them very basic truth concerning spiritual life and service. James Denney expounds the whole passage as revealing for all time the temptation of taking 'wrong roads to the Kingdom'. Concerning this first temptation keep in mind that Jesus could have turned the stones into bread. It was a real temptation. Later in His ministry He multiplied the loaves and fishes in a miraculous way because of the compassion of His heart for the hungry. But the result was as He expected. The people who were fed tried to make Him a king, an earthly king, to do this kind of thing again and again and so to meet the needs of society. Jesus had to escape from their intentions (John 6:14-15). To satisfy the all too clamant claims of the bodily nature is not the way to meet man's real need. That is why the answer of Jesus is given from Deut. 8:3. This man Jesus refused to move from the way and will of God even when pressurised by genuine pangs of hunger. His meat was to do the will of God who sent Him (John 4:31-34). Jesus stood His ground and refused to be moved into any panic measure however reasonable it seemed. He stood by what God had said, even although at that given moment there seemed to be little explanation as to why things should have to be so dark and costly. Note that this attack was basic and brutal and at first sight had to do only with those urgent appetites which cry aloud for satisfaction seeking to persuade us that we simply cannot go on without gratification. It is a lie! There is more to life than appetites, and some appetites grow more voracious the more they are indulged.

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#### 4:3-4

In order to help us to resist the Devil we must emphasise his technique of doubt which is essentially a slander against God, attributing to Him motives and intentions of harshness, cruelty and denial. Note here the subtlety of the Devil's strategy. It was after a prolonged spell of costly battle that the enemy came and virtually said: 'Can you really be the Son of God, the One in whom the purpose of God is to find fulfilment, and yet you find yourself right at the beginning of your mighty crusade up against it, utterly alone, hungry and worn out?' Having first created the situation of tension the Devil both used it and accused the Saviour in it. See how he creates doubt as to our calling, our willingness, our spiritual integrity so as to instil an immediate and strong desire for vindication that will prove we are right. This begets a restless spirit which casts around for some



method of quick advance, some expression of spiritual power, some results. This is what happens when, in the over-ruling providence of God (led by the Spirit into the wilderness), we find ourselves baffled, battered and feeling that every man's hand is against us and every attitude to us is one of criticism and denunciation. 'Do something to prove yourself,' suggests the Devil. Stand your ground! The God who has led you thus far is a God to be trusted utterly: yes, utterly!

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#### **4:5-8**

This temptation has been interpreted in various ways and it is difficult to comment on it briefly. What is envisaged by the Devil is a world-wide spiritual kingdom in which Christ would be the figurehead but the Devil would be the real power behind the throne. Such an awful prospect is not hard to imagine in our day when evil can be so plausible and religion can be so emptied of content. Note carefully that the Devil's claim is not contradicted here or elsewhere, and we are compelled to recognise the existence of a vast kingdom of this world under the rule and control of the prince of evil (1 John 5:19). This means that the temptation here is not to seek to establish a worldly kingdom as opposed to a spiritual kingdom. Christ is quite clear about this all along His ministry. His kingdom is not of this world nor established by the methods of the world. The temptation was to consider the possibility of enlisting evil in the service of good, to collaborate with the Devil in the service of God. This is an abiding temptation to individuals and to churches, especially when the existence of this world kingdom of evil is so manifest and frightening. Remember that the Devil is a deceiver and can appear as an angel of light. Be on guard, fully persuaded mentally first, then spiritually and emotionally, that to negotiate with evil is the same as worshipping the Devil. No good can ever come of such a policy and Jesus makes it plain here that the only attitude to evil, in whatever form it comes, is one of outright defiance and refusal. 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' (Matt.16:23AV)

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#### **4:5-8**

The various Scriptures on which yesterday's comment was based are as follows:- The kingdom of evil: John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 2:1-3; 6:11-12; 1 John 5:19. Christ's kingdom: John 18:36; Matt. 26:51:55; 2 Cor. 10:3-5. The religious guise of Satan: 2 Cor. 11:13-15. Keep in mind the spiritual significance to our Lord of His baptism and His authentication as Messiah by the very voice of God. Was He, the Son, not also King? Were not these kingdoms His by right? But how was this to become a reality in the face of the existing order of things? Can evil dictate its terms? Never! This whole ramification of darkness is to be challenged, conquered and put in chains. There can be no other way. The only alternative is to form a conglomeration of worldly kingdoms, nations and institutions vaguely and superficially bearing the name of Christ, while the power of evil still holds malignant sway. This cannot be and, as Thielicke says, in a moment 'Jesus Christ retreats from the centre of the conflict and goes behind God for He knows that it is God about whom and against whom this fight is waged.' Stake everything on God as you stand in, by and under His word. Have no truck with the enticing voices of Satan as he would inveigle you into compromise, or into silence about some vested interest that pleads to 'live and let live'. If you give in, your voice for God will be silenced and your power to serve strangled. We must stand by what God has said, and we must never come down (Nehemiah 6:1-9).

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#### **4:9-12**

The third temptation (the order is different in Matt 4:1-11) is a challenge to faith inasmuch as it suggests that the easiest way of winning ascendancy over people is to appeal to their senses and their love of the dramatic, the extravagant and the extraordinary. Keep in mind that all through the Gospels Jesus refused to give a 'sign' to the people, except that of His death and Resurrection, which sign, when it happened, they resolutely refused to believe because it had implications they did not wish to recognise and answer. Think also of Paul's method of evangelising and founding churches, which was largely a ministry of reasoning out of the Scriptures (Acts 17:2-3), a method that is anything but appealing to people's love of showmanship. In speaking to the Corinthians he went as far as to show the danger of eloquence and cleverness (1 Cor. 1:17-18. 21-23, 27-29; 2:1-5). It is not for nothing that it is recorded in Habakkuk 3:4 that God is a quiet worker, for the emotional and



mental reaction to sudden and astonishing happenings is not the same as faith which is authenticated by spiritual obedience and moral transformation. Whatever methods we seek to use we must make sure they are aimed at and capable of reaching the soul and not merely the senses. Music, atmosphere, eloquence, visual imagery and even the holy solemnity of the Communion Service can all move us but yet leave us essentially the same person, unchanged and no nearer God, although somehow feeling virtuous. Think of the seeming claim of the Roman church to be able to turn bread and wine into the body and blood, soul and divinity of the Son of God by means of elaborate ceremonial. Think of the influence this has on high and low alike, but it is not the influence by which the Kingdom of God is established. When the church begins to trust in forms, ceremonies, vestments, buildings and statistics it is evidence that she has ceased to trust in the truth of Scripture and in the God of truth.

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#### 4:9-12

Try to visualise the scene presented here with the Temple and its courts crowded with people. Quoting Psalm 91, especially v.11-12 (the Devil knows his Bible better than most Christians!), the Devil challenges Jesus to put God to the test, either by casting Himself down the sheer drop of some 450 feet to the Kidron valley below or down into the Temple Court right into the midst of the people. Whichever way, it would cause consternation and produce a huge crowd wrapt in attention immediately. But two important things must be recognised. Firstly, a crowd does not necessarily mean success, even when you find the crowd utterly under your control. A crowd is like a tide which ebbs and flows with many eddies of irrelevance and leaving many pools of stagnation. Secondly, to put God to the test is not the same as trusting Him. Indeed it is the opposite, for it is really asking for proof of God's good intention and sufficient power. 'He who asks for proof has not learned the meaning of faith.... He (Jesus) trusted God, but He did not challenge Him; the works that He did were not venturesome audacities of His own, they were the works that the Father gave Him to do. He never renounced moral sanity, as though something could be done for God beyond its limits which could not be done within them. He trusted God, certainly, but He knew the difference between faith and insane presumption, and He knew that no impression made on the senses, however profound, could establish God's sovereignty in the spirit.....This is precisely the kind of crowd which Jesus refused to draw. The kingdom of God is not there, nor is it to be brought by such appeals. It is not only a mistake, but a sin, to trust to attractions for the ear and the eye, and to draw people to the church by the same methods by which they are drawn to places of entertainment. What the evangelist calls 'the word' - the spiritual truth, the message of the Father and of His Kingdom - spoken in the Spirit and enforced by the Spirit, told by faith and heard by faith- is our only real resource, and we must not be \

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#### 4:13

We comment on this verse in the booklet 'Kingdom against Kingdom' studies in Ephesians 6. The alternative translations for the phrase 'until an opportune time' are 'for a season'(AV), 'until his next opportunity' (JBP), 'stood off from Him until another more opportune and favourable time' (Amplified NT), 'biding his time' (NEB). This last translation seems best to highlight the attitude and technique of Satan. He will be back. Be sure of it. We must be alive to 'the omnipresence, the steady persistent pressure, the sleepless malignity, of the evil forces which beset man's life.' (Denney on 2 Cor. 4:4). We cannot here trace the assaults of Satan on the life and ministry of our Lord, but must point out that although there were many more confrontations there were no more conflicts, for the battle had been decisively won on every possible level right here at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Read through the Gospels and you will find that Jesus never argued with the spirits of evil: He commanded them and they had to obey, for they were mastered. Yet they never gave up, nor will they give up in the battle against those who are set to do the will of God, seeking all along the line, on every possible occasion, to turn them away from total obedience to the will of God. The Devil will encourage us to take any and every way so long as it is not the way of faith which trusts God. Faith makes the Devil furious. Faith gives the believer victory.

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#### 4:14-15

From here to Chap. 9:51 Luke is dealing with our Lord's ministry in Galilee, and it is clear from 4:23 that some time had elapsed between the ending of the temptation and this event in Nazareth (16ff), possibly as much as a year. The first six chapters of John speak of this earlier ministry based largely in the south, Judaea and Jerusalem with, as the other Gospels indicate, visits to Galilee in the north. Jesus returned to Galilee, says Luke, and the time is after the ministry of John the Baptist had been summarily ended by his imprisonment. It is almost as if Jesus waited for the forerunner to finish his work before He began that ministry which was to place Himself squarely and painfully in the public eye. Note that the amazing victory in the wilderness did not make our Lord in any way impetuous. There is a time to act, and Jesus waited for it. But when the time came there was nothing to hinder the realisation of its potential. He came to His ministry in the unfettered power of the Spirit without limit or restriction. Go back to 3:22 and you will see the secret explanation of such unction. There was nothing in this Man's life to hinder the gracious intentions of God. He could be trusted with power because His whole life was yielded in utter obedience to God. It is this 'death to self' that makes it possible for the living power of God to be made manifest. A famous evangelist said sadly, 'There are few men God can trust with power.' How much can we be trusted?

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#### 4:16-30

This whole incident, by which Luke introduces our Lord's public ministry, must be taken in detail. Mark 6:1-6 is a good description of the atmosphere of Nazareth, especially when linked with John 1:46. This jaded community, soured by its own cynicism and unbelief, could be expected to be suspicious of the news (14) current about the ministry of this Jesus, even though it was based on the synagogue and praised by general consent (v.15). Note that in going to the synagogue service Jesus was following the custom of His upbringing and He was no stranger or outsider as far as this 'teaching ministry' of the house of God was concerned. With His reputation for words and works going before Him, Jesus had returned to Nazareth where, according to Mark's account He healed only a few sick folk. Naturally on the Sabbath the men were eager to hear what Jesus had to say for Himself. After someone else had read from the Law, the first five Books of the Old Testament (The Pentateuch), Jesus would have stood up to indicate He wished to speak and He was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah to read what may have been the appointed passage for the day (Isaiah 61:1-2, and possibly 58:6). But note in the first passage from Isaiah that He omitted the reference to the final day of judgment. The eyes of all were on Him, and they waited to hear the message, or application of the Word read. The reaction, in its various stages, we consider next.

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#### 4:16-30

We are not told the detailed content of Jesus' sermon, but v.21 makes it clear that He declared without ambiguity that the words read were fulfilled in Himself. It was a plain Scriptural statement that He was God's promised Messiah; that He brought the good news of life, deliverance and hope; and that the time was one of crisis of choice before the time of judgment came. The first reaction was that it had been a good sermon, well and graciously spoken (v.22). But as the searching, challenging impact of the Word spoken bore in on them, they adopted the usual technique of escapism by belittling the preacher. Their initial enthusiasm was chilled into indifference and scepticism by a deliberately adopted attitude because they resented this intrusion of authority into their established 'closed shop' religion. In spite of all their claims to spirituality their thinking was totally earth-bound, just as it was totally self-centred. They never thought that God would do something without their consent and collaboration, and of course, their primacy. Seeing their deep pride, Jesus went right on to illustrate from the story of Elijah and Elisha how God passed over a backslidden Israel full of unbelief and went to outsiders who showed faith and found salvation. The reaction of the Nazarenes to this was fury which would not have stopped at murder had not the overruling providence of God prevented them laying a hand on the Saviour. The coming of Christ and His word of authority exposed religion which was dead to the voice of God. All the mighty works and signs from heaven will never persuade such a people. God is out! No! Nazareth is out, and it fades from the scene.

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### 4:31-37

Blind unbelief and total rejection in Nazareth did not in any sense deter Jesus, and such was the content and authority of His message that the ordinary people in Capernaum were astonished (cf. Matt. 7: 28-29; John 7: 46). There was no prejudice of unbelief here, no contempt bred by familiarity, no pre-conceived ideas about God that reduced His Person and restricted His working, even though this was but a mere twenty miles from Nazareth. And, where there is this attitude of faith and receptivity, the power of God works significantly. But at the same time there will always be opposition, if not from men in the first instance, certainly from the powers of evil who seemed here to be fully aware that the Son of God had come to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8; Mk. 1:24; 5:7). Can we not see a similarity between the angry, resisting cry of the demon through the pathetic man who was his victim, and the raging shouts of the men of the synagogue at Nazareth? Whatever form it takes, the spirit which stands firmly and contemptuously against the Son of God is born of Hell. The cry of the demon spirit in v.34 is really, 'What have we in common with You?' and the answer is, of course, 'Nothing.' This is something which becomes evident in the context of any true work of God. By attitude, action and word, people declare that they are not part of what is being done by God. This is something which ultimately cannot be hidden, even by religion. Consider Acts 8:18-24 and 1 John 2:18-19.

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### 4:31-37

The emphasis in v.34 is really a cry of alarm from the powers of evil! We have to see here the wild, restless confusion of evil in the presence of its Master. First there is the cry of alarm, then the contemptuous reference to Nazareth, possibly hinting at His rejection by the establishment of religion there, then almost at once the confession that this Jesus is none other than the Son of God. In face of the wild rantings of evil Jesus did not argue, nor did He allow evil powers and persons to give testimony to His name and nature. Such spirits have absolutely nothing to contribute to the establishment of Christ's Kingdom, and we see here a repeat of the temptation in the wilderness. But there is no struggle or conflict now. The demon was muzzled, silenced, commanded to leave the man, and, after one last convulsive, vicious assault by which the evil spirit sought to hold on to his captive, he was cast out and the man was free. Note that it is clearly stated that the final rage of the demon was not allowed to hurt the man in any way. This Jesus is indeed a mighty Saviour. Note also that there is ground for believing that this man, a regular attender at the synagogue, was accepted as quite a normal person and behaved as such until the day that the Word of God came with power into the synagogue. This is the exposing, but health giving work of the Gospel, for it draws out into the open the hidden evils of nature and personality in order that people may be healed. This is why we must never be afraid of what our contact with the living Word of God may reveal in our lives. It is for our healing and deliverance. We are told nothing about the man's reaction afterwards. Perhaps he had a lot of thinking to do, perhaps trying to understand how he had come to need such a deliverance. He would certainly be a new man and be amongst those who would spread abroad the fame of this mighty Jesus.

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### 4:38-39

After the remarkable morning in the synagogue Jesus went quietly to the home of Peter. Notice that all the excitement was on the part of the crowd of people, while Jesus had treated the confrontation as 'normal' work to be expected and He was not in any way distracted by it. How different from us! Let there be any sign of God's working and we become almost hypnotised in excitement, perhaps taken by surprise, and very often lapse into a stupor of admiration rather than getting on with what lies ahead. Luke here distinguishes clearly between sickness and demon possession, but recognises that ultimately both come from the same evil source, and the fever was rebuked almost as if it were personal. So total was the cure that there was left none of the residual tiredness normal after a high fever, and without delay the woman went about organising the home and the meal for the guests. In this miracle of healing, as in the former one and in the ones to follow, Jesus is to be seen driving back the frontiers of Satan's dominion so that the powers of evil were not allowed in any way to hinder His working of salvation. Lest we misunderstand these healing miracles, keep clearly in mind that although Jesus is able to heal and does heal, He does not *always* do so. We may not say, as some do who have great interest in spiritual healing, that sickness and suffering are never the will of God. Ultimately, of course, all

sickness and pain shall be banished, as will the Devil and sin and all forms and manifestations of evil. But that day is not yet, and such is the Mastery of Christ over evil that He is prepared to allow it and to use it for good before finally exposing it and bringing it to judgment. In 2 Cor. 12:7-10 we have the classic example of this. It is because we know that all evil, in its various forms in human experience, is under the mastery of our Lord Jesus Christ that we neither panic nor fear in its presence.

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#### **4:40-44**

The earlier two miracles were done in the morning and afternoon of the Sabbath, no doubt under the disapproving eyes of the Pharisees. In the evening when the sun was set (Mk. 1:32), the new day having begun according to Jewish calculation, a whole crowd of people began gathering their sick and needy to Jesus. That they waited for the end of the Sabbath signifies their deep commitment to the Law of God, and their coming the very moment the Law allowed signifies their eagerness to avail themselves of this mighty visitation of grace. There is order and balance here, for Law and Grace are complementary rather than contradictory. Note how Jesus is said to have laid His hands on the people one by one (something He did not always do: be careful about making rules and patterns too rigid, especially about healing and miracles). Consider the tremendous fatigue this must have brought to Jesus. Again there is distinction drawn between the silent sick and the shouting demon-possessed, for the problems were different. If v.40 speaks of the gentle healing grace of the Son of God, v.41 tells of His stern, authoritarian rule over the powers of evil. He would not have them preaching even though their words were true! The response of faith must come from the people as a direct result of Jesus' words and the manifestation of His love in action on their behalf, and from no other source. How strange it is that the demons know so clearly who Christ is (Jas. 2:19) and yet people can be so unaware at times of His identity and power unto salvation. But here the people went after Jesus even into the wilderness, and little wonder, for they had never known care like this nor love so powerful to heal and save. But Jesus did not capitulate to their desire, for His work of mercy could not be confined to one place. All must hear of the Kingdom of God, the divine rule in action both for salvation and judgment.

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#### **4:40-44**

In considering v.42 we must read Mark 1:35; 6:46; Matt. 14:13, 23; Luke 6:12; 9:28, in order to grasp the significance of prayer in the life of our Lord. From the pressures of service He went aside to pray. We must not pity our Lord in the isolation of the desert, for it was a time of healing and re-creation for His weary spirit as He rested undisturbed in the presence of the Father. This is how there was reaffirmed over and over again His determination not to be distracted from the Father's will, so that even in the face of the pleadings of the people in all their need and desire He insisted on going on. Have you ever thought how clearly Jesus always seemed to know just exactly what had to be done next? Have you ever considered the amazing poise and calm of Jesus in every situation? Is not the answer found in this brief reference to His prayer life? Note finally that the reference in the last verse is to His preaching and teaching as the continuing work of the Kingdom rather than to His mighty works of healing. His work is begun and established in its direction, and in some senses we detect a divine restlessness in our Lord as He presses on. It is not the rush of unbelief but the restlessness of faith that is aware of a job to be done in a specified time. The public times of that work were undergirded and guarded by the secret times, and whether these times of prayer were repeats of the temptation in the wilderness or the transfiguration on the mount (it is veiled from our knowledge), the issue was power in both word and work. Little wonder the next passage speaks of men being called to follow.

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#### **5:1-11**

If we compare Matt. 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20 and John 1:35-52, it appears that the disciples had been called earlier in Jesus' ministry and, while they did follow Him, it was not in a complete and irrevocable sense. This is not to cast doubt on their sincerity but rather to indicate that with the Lord there are times and seasons, and He comes to His men to prove them, confirm them in their calling, and to master them as He so obviously does here with Simon Peter. Just how long elapsed between their earlier encounter with Jesus and this story cannot



be decided. Some say it was only a matter of weeks at the most, but others say a whole year had elapsed. It does not really matter. Time is relative. The whole incident is set in the context of the teaching of the Word of God, and it seems to have been this as much as the catch of fish, that brought to these men spiritual self-knowledge and an awareness of priorities that resulted in their commitment to total discipleship. We do not doubt that they were already Jesus' men and useful to Him, willingly useful as Peter's providing of the boat for a pulpit proves. But there were far wider and deeper realms of service waiting for them, in which service all their naturally developed qualities as fishermen would be put to use. They were to be fishers of men, not hunters, and in the process they would find themselves in a new way.

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### 5:1-11

There is a fascinating note of sovereignty in this story as we see how Jesus simply commandeered the boat and indeed commanded the whole situation (cf. Amos 7:14-15). In spite of past failure and present impossibility (as men would have judged) Jesus made the situation bring about mighty results. Perhaps it was an awareness of what Jesus could do, in contrast with what He had so far been able to do with him, that caused Peter's confession in v. 8. In some ways Peter was being too spiritual for that particular moment, for the boat was in danger of capsizing and it was practical action that was necessary. This was done after Jesus' reassuring words in v.10, and we are to assume that the catch was landed and sold, not least to provide for the families of these men, who had left their jobs to follow Christ. The point of the story is Jesus' miraculous influence with dispirited men, wearied by a night of profitless toil. These were the men He needed as His disciples, men disciplined by labour and hardship, but with the impetuous loyalty to say 'If You give the order I will do it.' How many times have we to confess failure in the words of v.5 and in consequence feel all the weariness of disappointed failure? It is right then that our Lord says to launch out into the deep, even when human assessment and calculation suggest that the situation is hopeless. Of course fishing the deep waters usually in the dark of night is not nearly so pleasurable as idling in the shallows in the morning sun. But these men had the capacity. All it needed was the captaincy of the Master which guarantees equilibrium even when the vessel seems in danger of being swamped by success. Aren't you glad Peter's prayer of v.8 was simply ignored by Jesus? There were many blunders yet to come in Peter's life but he eventually became a man used by God. But keep in mind how often his natural impatience and impulsiveness broke through in dangerous potential (cf. Matt.16:21-23). The Devil always aims at our weak points. Know them, and set a guard.

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### 5:12-16

The Law of the Jews forbade a leper coming into a city or near a healthy person just as it forbade anyone to touch a leper. But love and compassion take precedence over law, as Jesus had already shown in the previous chapter by healing on the Sabbath. How this leper had heard of Jesus and how much he knew of His power to heal we cannot say, but the man came and cast himself unconditionally at Jesus' feet, asking for healing yet submitting because he did not know if it was Christ's will to heal him. Perhaps the leper was persuaded of Jesus' ability but doubted His will, and if so we must imagine the welling up of emotion in the man's heart as Jesus spoke with kindness and then touched him as no other man would ever have done. When Luke says the leprosy (which in its foulness, debility, persistence, ostracism and curse speaks so clearly as a symbol of sin) departed immediately, he is pointing again to the total sovereignty of the mighty Lord of the Kingdom. All, even the foulest, must yield to the power of His saving grace. But note very carefully how Jesus instantly tempered the wave of powerful emotion in the healed man's heart by the challenge of religious duty. The transformation of the man expressed in consistency in respect of both the Law of God and the House of God was to be the testimony to an unbelieving religious institution concerning the person and word of Christ. That is the best publicity. The work of Christ is always in danger from sensation hunters, and this healed leper, carried away by his own emotional enthusiasm, caused hindrance by his indiscriminate gossiping of the 'news' to the continuing work of the Man who had healed him (Mark 1:45). Later on in Lk. 8:39 in different circumstances where there was no danger of mass excitement, Jesus commanded open testimony concerning what had been done. But here, what was needed but was not forthcoming was the quiet consistent testimony of a life of



spiritual integrity, not least to confound (they refused to be persuaded) the religious establishment which was suspicious and resistant to the point of diabolical intensity.

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### 5:17-26

We cannot go on into this section without referring back to v.15-16 in order to emphasise that what Jesus did in the seasons of solitude and prayer in the desert places was as much the work of God as what He did among the crowds. Indeed it was the wilderness seasons that dynamised the public seasons, just as the temptation in the wilderness underlay the authoritative commanding of the spirits of evil in public encounter. This we forget at our peril, and if we do not guard our communion with God we will find ourselves suddenly confronted with situations in which we will stand uncertain and helpless (Matt. 17:14-21). This is important, since we never know what will confront us or what reaction there will be to what is said and done. It is quite fascinating to trace through this chapter the authority and of Jesus' word in verses 1, 5, 13, 17, 24, 27-28. It is so clear again and again that the power of God was with Jesus and not with His opponents. But this did not persuade everyone and there was a division (there always is), as we see in v. 21, 26, 29-30. Now, when the word of salvation and life is met with such disdain, criticism and even hate (cf. John 9:24-34), it becomes necessary for Jesus to press home the word with cumulative effect, gradually but persistently precipitating crisis. In a very real sense Jesus did not defend His words and work. The fruit and consequences spoke for it. Read v.17 carefully, the last phrase being 'the power of the Lord was present for Him to heal.' From all places the Pharisees and teachers of the law (scribes) had gathered to criticise this man whose words and work refused to conform to the meticulous system of regulations they had fabricated and superimposed on God's holy law. They were like vultures, looking for, hoping for opportunity to persecute Jesus, and indeed were eventually to plan death (John 5:16; 11:53). Their attitude of dark unbelief highlights the glorious faith of the friends of the sick man.

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### 5:17-26

There is a powerful corrective here to the exaggerated individualism of our generation. The faith of the friends operated in a vicarious way and even though we cannot carry our needy people physically to Christ, we can in prayer bring them by faith, and our faith may prevail for them until they are able to believe for themselves. But what faith these men had! It would not be refused and countenanced no difficulties. They got to Jesus, and laid the problem right before Him and waited for the answer, which in fact came in two separate parts (20, 24). We do not know if the friends realised that some root cause of sin lay behind their friend's paralysis, but they make no protest at all after v.20 which seemed then to be all Jesus was going to say or do. But it is a mighty 'all', for the therapy of a conscience unburdened of its secret and long-carried load is wonderful, both in the short and long-term. It is a relief in the fullest sense of the word just to realise that someone else knows the guilty secret of our lives, especially when it is this Man who looks into the depth of our being, seeing everything, but showing no scorn or judgment, only love. The word of forgiveness was all that was needed, and the fact of the body being left as it was did not contradict or even qualify the miracle, for since the root cause of the paralysis was removed, in due time health and wholeness would come. To watch this happening in personalities bruised by sin is one of the gloriously satisfying parts of pastoral ministry. It is the attitude of the Pharisees to demand in every case that instant evidence be manifested of forgiveness. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees! Has it not taken a long time for the healing grace of God to change our lives and make them what they now are?

Blessed is the person with eyes to see that a basic work of God has been done in a human life, and with patience to wait for the visible confirmation.

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### 5:17-26

These verses are of far reaching importance and we must grasp them fully. The Pharisees jumped in before Jesus or the friends or the man were able to say anything, and they presented their challenge on the ground that Jesus' attitude and words did not conform to 'sound doctrine'. He was doing what they, the religious specialists, could not do and they wanted proof, if there was any, that these words, seemingly so blasphemous, were ratified in heaven. They were not blasphemous words; Jesus agreed that only God can forgive, but He is God the Son. If

they were at all in doubt then He would confirm the truth by the second half of the miracle, namely instant physical healing. But the Pharisees were not really interested in the sick man, a strong condemnation of their religion, but only in confounding this Person who claimed to be the Son of Man, a name which later Luke makes more patently plain (9:26; 12:8ff.) in its significance. The sign and proof of physical healing to this forgiven sinner did not in any sense persuade these Pharisees, for the simple reason that they did not want to be persuaded. This is one of the frightening things many ministers testify to when the true message of the Gospel is introduced in the power of the Holy Spirit to a congregation. People would rather have dead religion, irrelevant to human and spiritual need, than a living Christ. What condemnation! How tragic!

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### 5:27-29

Lest the comments on the last passage be misunderstood, read John 9:1-3 to see how clearly Jesus declares that all sickness is *not* due to sin. It can be, in ourselves and our children after us, who may inherit much of the fruit of our misdeeds and unwisdom. But it is not an easy thing to explain sickness and suffering. Never forget that our whole world of experience is a fallen world, gone wrong and dominated by the powers of evil. This is the mystery of iniquity. Over against the complicated stories of some, there is this gloriously simple story of Levi. He was rich as a result of his job of gathering trade taxes for the Roman authorities. He was despised, perhaps in his own eyes as much as the eyes of others. He had everything the world could give, but what he really wanted was something the world could not give. He was a lonely, lifeless soul, conscious of a lost inheritance and a forfeited destiny. Not a man on earth would have lifted a finger to help him. Why should they? He had heard much about Jesus. The grace of God was already drawing his heart, and when the invitation came he was absolutely ready for it and there was not even a moment's hesitation. The crisis of choice had no undertones of secret sin to be forsaken, for there is no real suggestion that Levi was corrupt, as Zaccheus was. But he was rich and he was being asked to give it all up for this Man. And he did. His last action in his privileged position was the great feast for all his associates so that they might see and hear this Jesus in whom he had found life that answered the hungry cry of his heart. No doubt many were shocked by Jesus asking such a man to be a disciple. Perhaps Levi himself was, but Jesus knows what He is doing. The fruit of this incident is seen in the satisfying story of the Gospel which Levi (Matt. 9:9) has given to us.

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### 5:30-32

If some were shocked by the call of Levi they were profoundly aghast at the sight of Jesus freely and openly associating with despised sinners. No doubt some of the company, but certainly not all, were among the lowest types of men, for few would accept the job of tax-gatherer under the Roman rule. But who was to be the bridgehead of God's grace to reach these sinners so needful of salvation? The attitude of the orthodox Pharisees was that they were always available for sinners to come to them for help, but they would never go to the sinner. The reason for this was a very deep fear lest their sanctity and separation unto God should be soiled. But holiness that is so fragile and vulnerable is not much use in a real world! Yet it is this kind of rigid holiness which condemns all who do not conform to its meticulous code and which lives in constant fear lest some minute rule be broken. This attitude of the Pharisee is essentially salvation by separation, superiority and by conformity, be it negative or positive. Such inhibition of life and personality, which must never be confused with Christian discipleship, will inevitably produce fear and with it criticism of all that seems to invade its sacrosanct domain of 'being right with God'. The last thing spiritual pride will ever do is to take the place of the sinner that Jesus came to save, and acknowledge need. Indeed the Pharisees seem to suggest that a doctor should only visit healthy people in case he catches infection. The good news we preach is not a set of quarantine regulations but the arrival of power to heal the sickness of sin.

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### 5:33-35

Yesterday's note must not be twisted to provide warrant for Christians sharing company and activities which are suspect and compromising and ultimately destructive. 'Be not squeezed into the mould of the world' is abiding counsel and we do well to consider Rom. 12:1-2; 14:1-23; 1 John 2:15-19; 1 Cor. 8:1-13. Whatever does not

proceed from faith is sin, and the development of the situation will make clear by its results from what source it has stemmed. Such was the inner integrity of our Lord that He had no fear of and no risk of contamination and was consequently in no way disturbed or unbalanced by his critical audience. Remember however that He was always very wise and never careless! While He would hold counsel with Nicodemus alone in the dark of the night, His conversation with the notorious woman of Samaria was in the full blaze of noon-day. Even in our seeking of the lost to bring them to salvation we must be wise to abstain from all appearance of evil. This we must do 'unto the Lord' and not in conformity with what is expected by 'the best people', be they ever so sound. In the end, indeed all along the way, we live unto God and not men, and God knows our hearts.

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### **5:33-35**

That religion and Christianity are two distinct things is just as evident from the questions posed by John the Baptist's disciples as from the criticisms made by the Pharisees. Like the Pharisees, but on a far higher and different level, John's disciples, following their master, had set a stern standard for the lives of disciples in a wicked generation. From Matt. 9:14-17 and John 3:25-30 we see that John's disciples were defective in understanding concerning Christ. More than a little they were tending to show themselves on the wavelength of the Pharisees rather than of Jesus. They too resented the refusal of Jesus to conform to their rigorous, ascetic pattern of life and ministry. But Jesus says that if fasting is out of place during a wedding feast how much more is it out of place when the Messianic 'bridegroom' (John's own name for Jesus – John 3:28-30) is with His own. The time would come when He would be 'taken away', a reference to His violent death, and then would be the time for fasting and indeed suffering. Note very carefully that in these verses Jesus does not say that the life of discipleship will be all sweetness and gaiety. There is the constant note of repentance (32) and of suffering (35) but flexibility rather than rigidity in the presentation of the truth is the mark of God's unction. It is those who stay outside God's grace (Pharisees) and those who do not grow up and move on in grace (John's disciples) who petrify and become critics of God's grace when it does not conform to their ideas. How searching!

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### **5:36-39**

The danger highlighted here is that of trying to mix things that will not mix, of forcing co-operation on things that in fact stand over against each other. Jesus will not be stuck on like a patch to old life and religion. He is everything and makes all things new and to prefer the old to the new is like preferring a skeleton to a living flesh-and-blood person. Of course people do prefer skeletal religion because it can be manipulated and shut up in a cupboard, whereas a living man has to be lived with and allowed to impinge on their lives. This parable is also recorded in Matt. 9:16-17 and Mark 2:21-22 where the patch is simply a piece of unused material, and the lesson is obvious. But Luke speaks of the shocking business of ripping a piece of cloth out of a perfectly good garment to patch up an old shoddy one. The result is loss on every level. In like manner new wine, which has power to ferment and become something far richer, must not be put into old dried wineskins which will simply burst and the wine be lost. New wine, with all its potential, must be put into new bottles capable of preserving it. The sad thing is that (taking the illustration on the human level) those accustomed to the taste of old wine have no inclination to taste the new. But to prefer the old religion of Law and Promise to the new of fulfilment in the Word of God made flesh is a testimony to the blind hardness of sinful hearts. To some Jesus is simply not acceptable however He comes to them. This we see in the next readings.

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### **6:1-5**

The real issue here is not the Sabbath but Jesus, His person, His authority and His uniqueness as the full and final revelation of God. This is what lies at the heart of all such questions as the use to be made of Sunday. It is sad that in our day we seem to concentrate, like the Pharisees, on what is forbidden on the Sabbath rather than on what is enjoined. After all the day was instituted as a blessing before it was set apart as holy and incorporated in the Law of God for a fallen world (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11). Keep in mind that for the Jew the keeping of the Sabbath was a glorious weekly opportunity for public demonstration of the fact that he was one of God's people, and such a testimony is needed in our own generation. When Monday morning discussions

start at work, what opportunities present themselves when week-end activities are spoken of. But too many Christians have to confess that in practice they have been no different from unbelievers. Of course we must recognise the tendency of religion to degenerate into formalism, and when this happens there will be either a complete disregard of the Sabbath or a slavish, legalistic observance of it which ignores all the claims of common humanity. Since it is Christ who is Lord of the Sabbath, not anyone and everyone else, when we are in His company, doing His will, we are more likely to keep the spirit of the law than when we are slavishly conforming to rules, however high in principle, which have been formulated by men. Jesus' illustration from David's life (1 Sam. 21:1-6), when he ate the bread of the Presence which only the priests were allowed to eat, was a telling one, for the Pharisees admitted the rightness of the action. In the same way with the Sabbath, the spirit of the law must be seen to be a spirit of grace unto life, and not a mere prohibition to judgment. But remember very clearly it is Jesus alone who is Lord of the Sabbath, not we ourselves!

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### **6:6-11**

If we link v. 2, 7 and 11 we begin to see the exposure of the Pharisees' rigid adherence to the Law of the Sabbath. They counted it wrong to rub a few ears of corn; wrong to heal unless dire emergency and risk to life made it clear that delay would be fatal; but it was not wrong for them to spy on the Son of God and plan His murder. How hypocritical! But be careful before we begin to throw stones! On one hand we have the rigid forms of dead religion, insensitive to God and to man, and on the other hand we have the person of the Lawgiver, the Lord of life Himself. But when people prefer the Law to the giver of it they are exposed. To these men the Law was an end in itself, something to be guarded, and something they could manipulate and administer. But Law is a servant within the economy of grace to lead us to life which is in Christ (Gal. 3:19, 24-25). Of course we cannot manipulate Christ. That is why so many prefer religion. But note here how Jesus, knowing their thoughts, takes the initiative and asks the Pharisees what the Sabbath is for and what may rightly be done on the Sabbath. Note that He makes it clear that to do nothing would amount to the same as to do evil. With a mixture of anger and sorrow (Mk. 3:5) He looked on those men whose system meant more to them than man or God, He commanded the man to stand forth and He healed him. In doing so Jesus signed His own death warrant (Mk. 3:6). Religious people can be as angry as Hell if God interferes with their religion. These men were so blinded by their idolatry of the Law that they failed completely to see that Jesus was far more devoted to the spirit of the Law, and to the observance of it, than they were (Matt. 5:17-20), not least in that He fulfilled it while they simply observed it.

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### **6:12-16**

In view of the mounting hostility of the rulers of the Jews and their deliberate intention to kill Him, it is not surprising to find Jesus engaged in a long night of prayer prior to choosing His close disciples who would be the heart of His work in the future. These twelve men (symbol of the twelve tribes of Israel) were to be the nucleus of the new people of God, called out from the remnant of faith. They were very ordinary men, few of them ever hitting the headlines, but they were chosen in the clear knowledge of the will of God. How then do we find Judas Iscariot among such chosen ones? It certainly was not a mistake! This is made clear by the emphasis on the long night of prayer in which Jesus communed with the Father. Even the traitor was chosen (John 6:70-71) and he was a devil (diabolos), and in that choice the personality of evil himself was drawn deliberately into closest contact with the Son of God in a way that he could not escape. The heart of the Son of God was bared to the fangs of evil in order that evil might be challenged to do its worst and be destroyed. Think of Jesus' command to Judas when the crisis came, 'Be quick about your business,' (John 13:27 JBP) and realise again His total mastery over the Devil. But at the same time remember what agony and anguish it must have been to have incarnate evil so close in such an intimate way all through His ministry. We have built up a picture of Jesus, surrounded by Satanic religion that has not a place for God as He really is, and at the heart of the situation the Satanic presence in company together with Jesus' men. What a dividing of humanity? Where do we fit in?

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## 6:12-16

The list of apostles is given also in Acts 1:13; Matt. 10:2-4; and Mark 3:16-19. In each case Peter is mentioned first because he was the recognised leader of the group, but we remind ourselves of the long and costly road by which Peter reached the place of dependability and usefulness in the work of Christ. Andrew, the fisherman, was a very basic personality and was always bringing people to Jesus, Peter being the first of these (John 1:35-42; 12:21-22). Tradition has it that he was crucified for Christ's sake. Of the two sons of thunder James died a martyr's death (Acts 12:2) and John, the beloved disciple, ended up in exile on Patmos after a lifetime of service (Rev. 1:9). These two along with Peter were taken by Jesus into the deepest moments of life and ministry (Mk. 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). It was John who was given the care of Mary after the crucifixion (John 19: 26-27). He was not, of course, perfect (Luke

9:49-56). Philip, instrumental in bringing Nathanael (John 1:43-46), seems to have been an indecisive character (John 6:5; 12:20-22; 14:8-9). Some suggest an identification of Philip with the evangelist in Acts 6:5; 8:5, 26ff; 21:8 but there is no real confirmation of this. Bartholomew is most probably to be identified with Nathanael (John 1:45-51). Matthew is Levi the tax gatherer, a real trophy of grace. Thomas, the twin, (John 11:16; 20:24-29) was very much the doubter, always seeing the gloomy, fatalistic side of things, yet at the same time willing to take a real risk for Jesus' sake. James the son of Alphaeus (not to be confused with Matthew's father (Mk. 2:14)) is usually identified as James the less, the smaller or younger James, son of Mary (Mk.15:40), the wife of Clopas. Simon the Zealot, an ardent nationalist, possibly with a temperament matching his name, is simply mentioned. Judas, son (not brother) of James, is also called Lebbeaus and Thaddaeus (not a relative of the brothers James and John) and is mentioned only as having asked a question in the upper room (John 14:22). Some say he is the author of the Epistle of Jude, but this seems unlikely. The name of Judas the traitor completes the list of Jesus' men.

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## 6:17-19

To set the scene for Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount (a greatly abbreviated version of Matt. 5-7), we must recognise three groups of people. The previous evening (Matt. 5:1) crowds had gathered around Jesus. The night was spent alone on the mountain in prayer after which the twelve were chosen (Lk. 6:12-13). Then with His chosen apostles Jesus came down as far as a suitable level place where He met with the crowd which had made its way up the hillside to meet Him. In the crowd there were of course Jesus' wider company of disciples as well as the general crowd of needy, interested and critical people (a typical congregation). It was to the *disciples* that He addressed His words although all the others could hear. The sermon comes as a naturally developing part of Jesus' ministry in which He revealed Himself in His unqualified authority as the 'lawgiver' of the Kingdom. This is no mere catalogue of rules of behaviour, but the guide for life for those who acknowledge the rule of the King Himself. We have already seen how the progress of Jesus' work brings inevitable conflict with both the world and the religious establishment. But now the disciples were shown that there is also an abiding warfare to be waged against the innate self-will and self-centredness of our carnal hearts. This is the real root of the problem, and it is exposed and challenged here in a most devastating manner. Right from the Beatitudes we see two kingdoms of different attitude and spirit. One of them calls for a mighty death to self. Let us begin to learn.

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## 6:20-26

Remember that we are reading words spoken primarily to those who had already heard Jesus and followed Him in commitment of life. The passage declares a complete reversal of the world's values and we must see that it is the attitude to poverty and possessions which is being spoken of rather than a measurement of these categories. The joys of being a child of the Kingdom are the result of being a certain kind of person. Having found reward in this life here on earth, such a person will find the same, but to an even greater extent, in the world that is to come. Jesus' word about poverty is not a general commendation or glorification of misfortune, as if misery in itself was the guarantee of eternal bliss. If that were so, there would be some thoroughly unpleasant and nasty characters in Heaven because poverty can make people bitter, harsh and inhuman in self-preoccupation, just as riches can make people contemptuous of all whom they cannot make use of, and arrogantly ruthless to all who



can be manipulated to increase their wealth. The world works on the principle of 'a bird in the hand' and praises (and envies) the self-confident man who believes in himself. But Jesus blesses the man who knows and acknowledges his poverty and in so doing seeks, finds and submits to the King who brings the kingdom. The hungrier a man is the more he will approach a banquet with need, capacity and without distraction. The opposite is true of those who feel and reckon themselves rich, and so exclude themselves from the presence and invitation of the King. With what difficulty the rich may enter the kingdom (Lk. 18:21-25). They are tied to themselves and to the world and cannot bow down to enter the low door of the kingdom open to those who know their real poverty.

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### **6:20-26**

The disciples had exchanged the comparative affluence of work such as fishing for the poverty of following Jesus, and had accepted conflict in place of comfort. But they were not the losers, for they had Christ, and He is all. There is a price to pay, in hunger now, that will yet be filled (2 Cor. 5:1-9) and in tears now, because of the costliness of service and experience, which will yet be dried (Ps. 126:6). It is not easy to weep over our own sins and the sins of the world, nor in company with Jesus to see more and more what sin does to people and to a whole world that is dying in agony while still rejecting the King (John 11:35; Lk. 19:41). But the future to Jesus' followers is filled with hope. The world will have none of this philosophy of life, insisting that the blessed, are the satisfied, not the hungry. This is the attitude of the materialist who, refusing point-blank to recognise the temporary nature of all that is material, says to himself, 'You have much goods, take your ease. All is provided for you,' (Lk. 12:13-21). This kind of life is a lie! The blessedness of the kingdom is for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt. 5:6), and this is true, for happiness is a by-product of that righteousness which is salvation and found only in the King. The world wants happiness without this righteousness and its costly life, choosing a life of 'lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God' (2 Tim. 3:1-7), forgetting that the 'pleasures of sin' (undoubtedly real) are only for a season (Heb. 11:25-26). Life can end up very full but very empty. Look at worldly faces and you see this. As the prodigal son knew, there is a hunger and emptiness which can be satisfied only in the Father's house.

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### **6:20-26**

There is a ruthlessness on the part of the world towards those who make it quite plain they belong to Christ, and it is not easy to be hated, excluded, reviled and have your name cast out in scornful contempt. The world may recognise sincerity and even secretly be impressed or be attracted to it, but because it is sincerity in Christ, the world will not tolerate it. It will persecute because sincerity is a devastating thing for a bad conscience to live with (John 15:18-25). But all the true prophets were persecuted (Acts 7:51-53) as Jesus Himself was. But this will not deter a true disciple, as these very men were yet to demonstrate, for the reward is not confined to heaven. There is a rich compensation here and now (Mk. 10:28-30) which all the brickbats in the world cannot change. Indeed, they only serve to heighten the privilege (Acts 5:41-42). On the other hand the reversal of the fortunes of those whose attitude signifies that they reject the King and scorn the Kingdom is portrayed with radical words in v.24-26. There is no escape from what we have chosen to become, and the misery when everything people have lived for and sold their souls for is burned into nothingness is anguish that can never be quenched. Read Revelation 18:1-24, where Babylon can be thought of as the worldly world that has never had a place for Christ or His people. We need to take a long view of human experience, a very long view, if we are to live wisely.

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### **6:27-38**

We shall take several days to study this section which could well be misunderstood if taken out of its context. We are dealing with personal relationships rather than social and political attitudes. But, since the body politic is made up of individuals, the far-reaching effect of these principles of behaviour here enunciated is obvious. All who hear are called to pay heed (27), and while this indicates the general application of Jesus' words to everyone, it also implies that only those who hear in faith the earlier words (20-26), and so enter the kingdom

of God's grace, will be able to receive this word that exposes the innate self-centredness of human life. The example of love which must always challenge us is that of Christ Himself, Who yielded all His rights to do the will of God and the work of the Kingdom (Phil. 2:1-8). What do we mean by love? 'The Greek language has three words for love, which enable us to distinguish Christian love (agape) from passionate devotion (eros) and warm affection (philia). Jesus did not tell His disciples to fall in love with their enemies, or to feel for them as they felt for their families and friends. Agape is a gracious, determined, and active interest in the true welfare of others, which is not deterred even by hatred, cursing, and abuse, not limited by calculation of deserts or results, based solely on the nature of God. Love does not retaliate (27-31), seeks no reward (32-36), is not censorious (37-38).' (Caird) It is all very practical and therefore possible. Love (though you may not like), do good (though you may not feel good), bless (the word is literally "eulogise", speak well of) instead of returning their slander, and pray. In God's presence we do not prattle and complain about the other person's faults but engage in spiritual warfare for their good.

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### **6:27-38**

There is always a tremendous risk in loving, for love can be refused. It can overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:9-21), but it can also end up in crucifixion. Of course we must be clear in our minds that love and weakness are not the same. Love must at times refuse even the most agonising request for the sake of the good of the one loved. Love that ministers to indulgence is not love! If we take v.30 out of this context we could have a queue of scoundrels at our door, and a verse such as Matt. 5:39 with the words 'do not resist evil' would lead not only to extreme pacifism (even in defence of home and family from marauders) but to total anarchy. Think of how Jesus rebuked an irresponsible official in John 18:19-23. We must see love as always working actively for the good of the loved one, even when severe measures have to be taken. But remember that Jesus is speaking here of loving enemies, and the people He addressed knew what it meant to be in a situation surrounded by enemies who were anything but kind, often harsh in their aggression and provocation. The natural reaction was to be calculating, defensive and retaliatory, but Jesus called them, not merely to be quietly submissive but to rob animosity of its sting by going beyond the enemy's demands. This is a hard saying. It is one thing to yield one's rights in the interest of a Christian brother (1 Cor. 6:1-7), but to deal so with an enemy....., this is Christianity! Is not the objective to gain the enemy for Christ who died for the enemy? (Rom. 5:6-8)

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### **6:27-38**

Those whose natural reaction is to retaliate whenever personal rights are threatened will always be asking Peter's question in Matt. 18:21-22 and receiving Jesus' answer in the following verses of that passage. But a spirit of living forgiveness cannot be married to a spirit of such calculating exactitude and if we can, in fact, keep the score of 'hurts' with such a Shylock spirit, waiting for the time to claim our 'pound of flesh' there is something far wrong with our Christianity. It is a Christianity alien to Christ, who here (31) propounds a very positive rule of behaviour. It is not enough to say 'do not do to others' in case they might repay you in like manner. 'Most people have a rough and-ready ethic based on common sense, enlightened self-interest, give-and-take; and they can claim to be as good as their neighbours. But the followers of Jesus must go further. Other systems distinguish what is right from what is wrong: Jesus distinguishes what is good from what is merely right, and urges His disciples not to be content with the lower standard. Duty is not enough. Duty obeys the rules but love grasps opportunities. Duty acts under constraint, love is spontaneous and therefore gracious. Duty expects to be recompensed or at least recognised, love expects nothing in return. To love like this is to be sons of the Most High; for likeness is proof of parentage'. (Caird). 1 Peter 2:11-25 is a very full comment on the above quotation.

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### **6:27-38**

'Measure for measure' can be a very bitter expression of the spirit of the world and it is a contradiction of all we mean by mercy. In v.35 'without expecting to get anything back' could read 'hoping for nothing', 'never despairing' or 'despairing of no man', and the verse leads on to this last section of the passage dealing with

mercy. Now, we understand mercy only when we see it as undeserved forgiveness when some real sin has been done against us, hurting us to the very depth. If we have received this mercy from God, we dare not deny it to another even although we see clearly the wrong of the action and the person. The forbidding of judging here does not prevent us ever passing unfavourable verdicts on people or actions. We must discern between good and bad, between good and best, and between wise and foolish. But in our attitudes and actions we must remember that to judge is to assess on the basis of *all* the facts of the case and only then to pass fair comment. But only God knows all. That is why we must keep our mouths closely under control. 'Then at the balance let's be mute; we never can adjust it. What's done we partly may compute, we know not what's resisted.' (Burns) To be ready to cast the first stone is not a Christian attitude. Read Matt. 7:1-5 and John 8:1-11.

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### **6:39-40**

The immediate connection with the previous verses is not very clear. In v. 37 we are warned against judging others and in v.38 it is emphasised that God's gifts, including His mercy, come most fully to those who pass them on to others. Now the theme here is that of the influence of teachers on their pupils and the message seems to be that like begets like. Such a statement makes a minister examine himself rather than blame his congregation when he is disappointed in them! Every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher (v.40). If the teacher is not right himself, then, being blind to true spiritual wellbeing, he will lead others into the same ditch of blindness. This is solemn and serious. Is Jesus saying here that it is lack of self-judgment that leads to this state of blindness which is so dangerous to ourselves and others? Consider Rom. 14:10-13; 1 Cor. 4:2-5; 11:31-32; 2 Cor. 10;12. It is the man who knows himself best, because he has judged himself and scrutinised his own life and motives, who is able to teach and lead others. The man who is perpetually critical of others is usually so filled with himself that he sees none of his own faults. This kind of man will have a ministry which simply leads others into his power. If we read in John 13:12-17, words very similar to today's passage, we shall see that to be a Christian is not a case of being superior to others but of being a servant to all. We need to be very careful, for the blindness of spiritual pride goes hand in hand with disobedience (Matt. 23:1-12ff.).

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### **6:41-45**

Defective eyesight is a serious business, especially when a man blinded by a plank in his eye spends his time looking for the speck of sawdust in the other man's eye. Of course, the man with the speck of sawdust in his eye (and we all know how painful that is and how we can find no peace until it is dealt with) sees how ridiculous his critic is and how lamentably pathetic is his attitude. The man with the plank is no help to anybody, not even himself, but by his criticisms of everyone he destroys all we mean by fellowship and sets the whole company at variance within itself. It is easy to pick faults, forgetting that the sinner may well be very painfully aware of them. But it is a different thing to remove the speck of grit that causes the pain. That needs a clear eye, a steady hand, a gentle heart (cf. Gal. 6:1-5), and a desire to help. All these will soon manifest themselves if Christ dwells in a person's heart. This is the point of the trees and the fruit (43-45). If a man's talk is always about himself you know what his god is. If he talks incessantly about the world, about sin and about others, you know what his interests are and what kind of man he is. It is as simple as that. Too many professing Christians are far more interested in sins than in the Saviour, more interested in condemning than in saving, and more likely to break a sinner than to heal him. This tells all. 'This is a parable about personal relationships.

Pseudo-religion, which Jesus calls hypocrisy, is for ever trying to make other people better; and the cure for it is a mirror.' (Caird) We have such a mirror in the word of God (Jas. 1:22-27).

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### **6:46-49**

Christian life is obedience to a Person and not conformity to a set of rules. Religious emotion, often very undisciplined, can masquerade as true faith and it needs to be exposed, and will be exposed by the discipline of events. The storms and floods will come, and all will be made plain. The 'rock' here is not Christ (although in the ultimate sense Christ is all) but rather character wrought in obedience. It also seems clear that 'doing' is the same here as 'digging', and that the two houses were built on the same site, side by side, like two people sitting

under the same ministry of the Word. One digs and one does not; the response is as radically different as that. One person may flash up into prominence and gain spiritual reputation completely overshadowing the other. The other listener, in obedience to the self-slaying word, may be digging down into the foundations of life and experience, dismantling years of accumulated debris and character twists and inhibitions, until he comes to rock bottom. All this time there is not a great deal to show for all his costly obedience, and the other fellow's edifice is quite overshadowing and demoralising, not least because it gives others grounds for criticism by comparison. But the man of obedience has reached a firm basis on which a house of character and service can be built and so sure and secure is its foundation that nothing will ever shake it. When the storms come, the other man's jerry-built facade will collapse and its fall will be great, perhaps permanent. Note that Matthew introduces his version of this story with very searching words (Matt. 7:21-23). 1 Cor. 3:10-15 is another passage we need to study well. There is all the difference in the world, and in the next world too, between surface Christians and those who dig down.

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### **7:1-10**

Luke continues his story of the self-revelation of Jesus by giving, in this section (7:1-35), the story of Jesus' encounter with four groups of people; the centurion, the widow, John the Baptist and the general crowd. In doing so Luke shows four aspects of Jesus: His power, compassion, method and challenge. It must have given Luke, the Gentile, considerable pleasure to record in this first story that the highest commendation of faith uttered by Jesus was addressed to a Gentile. We can well imagine the reaction and resentment of the elders of the Jews and how this would confirm their desire to be rid of this Jesus. In order to point home the lesson of faith to the people (9) our Lord was blunt, and some might say tactless. But He recognised that some had already made it plain that they would not believe and their anger had to be risked in order to reach others. But the thrill of Jesus' heart in meeting faith like this must not be overlooked. He was so truly man that He was encouraged by such a response, just as He grieved at other times over the hardness of men's hearts. Note the dramatic movement of the story. Jewish elders, who would never have come to Jesus of their own accord and who refused to recognise Him for what He was, were prepared to come at the request of the man who had donated to them a building for worship. They claimed for the man a worthiness and merit that he himself denied. But Jesus confirmed the man's stature, recognising that, through the best influences of the Jewish synagogue and in spite of its massive dereliction in spiritual life and practice, this man had come to know what faith meant. This is by no means the only time that a person from outside the House of God has exposed the emptiness of those inside.

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### **7:1-10**

In Matthew 8:5-13 we are told that the centurion came in person to Jesus, possibly after he knew his messengers had been received graciously and that Jesus was on His way to the house. Luke insists that there was no actual meeting of the two men, yet the man's prayer was granted. From Matt. 11:20-30 we learn that Capernaum was a stronghold of unbelief among the Jews; and yet it was here that the glory of Christ was revealed to a 'babe' in spiritual things like the centurion. There are two miracles in the story: the actual healing by Jesus without any physical contact with the sick servant. He willed it, and because we know who Jesus is, we are not surprised. It is a defective doctrine of God which arbitrarily discounts the miraculous. The other miracle is the centurion's faith, so humble yet so mighty, the faith of a man of some position who had yet a tender compassion for a mere servant. When he said, 'Just say the word,' he evidenced a spiritual perception that was truly amazing. The centurion, being an army man, knew that a word of command could produce instant results, and did so because of the higher authority which had granted him the commission. He recognised that Jesus, of whom he had heard many reports, was also a Man under authority, and for that reason he had no doubt whatever as to His power and capacity. Note that it never occurred to the centurion that Jesus might be unwilling to answer his earnest petition. Such doubts come from unbelief, not faith. It is strange that there is no indication at all that Jesus entered the man's house, yet His commendation stands for all history. Here was a man who saw, in a way that many others who were healed failed to see, that in Jesus the Kingdom of God was present and active. God Himself was amongst men. Lord, increase our faith and give us eyes to see!



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### **7:11-17**

Again the main point here is not the actual miracle, for we are not to be surprised by anything Jesus does since He is God incarnate. The emphasis is on the extensive and tender compassion of Jesus for the widow in her distress, and His capacity to ease the sorrow by removing the cause of it. This is one of three instances of Jesus raising the dead, the others being Luke 8:41ff. and John 11:1ff. Note here that Jesus' action was one of total grace, for there was no appeal to Him by the woman. He was moved by the widow's sorrow, and His miraculous intervention was for the woman's sake, not the son's. This is emphasised right through the story, which has certain similarities to the story of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:23-24), and which may explain the reaction of the people in v.16, for they would all be familiar with the stories of Elijah. Luke in v.13 gives Jesus the title 'the Lord', and it is as the Lord of life that He banishes death and re-unites loved ones in His presence. This is what this same Jesus does for all believers in the end; He raises and gives them back to each other (1 Thess. 4:13-18). We are not told if the mother and son became disciples of Jesus as a result of His gracious act on their behalf and we have no idea what had caused the son's death. Perhaps this boy brought his mother much heartache in later years! We cannot tell. What we can be sure of is that Jesus made enemies among the rulers of the Jews, for it was against the law to touch the dead (Num. 19:11ff). Perhaps if Jesus had consulted with them they might have granted Him a dispensation to act. But God does not like when people seek to rule and confine Him in His work of grace.

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### **7:18-23**

On hearing news of Jesus' words and works John the Baptist, now in prison, sent messengers to ask questions in order to allay his doubts. It may seem strange to think of such a mighty man as John having doubts, but remember that he was in prison for righteousness sake, and there was no sign of Jesus doing anything to accomplish his release. As far as John could see there did not seem to be in Jesus' ministry and influence a fulfilment of what John himself had spoken of in Luke 3:2-6, 15-20; cf. Matt. 3:1-17. John's own ministry seemed to call for the overthrow of the Roman yoke and the establishing there and then of the Kingdom of God on earth, which would have involved a judgment of the whole structure of barren Pharisaic religion. But this was not happening. John had no doubts about the miracles of Jesus nor about His teaching, but he was exceedingly perplexed by Jesus' methods and their manifest limitations as he saw it. John saw the scepticism and antagonism of the rulers, the superficial moving of the people by the miracles, the concentration by Jesus on a narrowing group of disciples and all this tended to make him feel that opportunity was passing unrealised. Then John did the right thing in such perplexity. He sent direct to Jesus, who answered his doubts by taking him back to the familiar and assured ground of Scripture in Isaiah 35:3- 6 : 61:1-3. John had to believe that Messiah would do His work in the right way, at the right time, and he must wait to see it come to pass. Did not John know of the incident in Luke 4:16-19 where Jesus deliberately omitted reference to the day of vengeance? The day of casting down of evil is not yet. But it will come.

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### **7:24-35**

It is a happy man whose faith enables him to believe that God knows best even when his faith is assailed by doubt (23). John's doubts arose from his realism in facing a concrete situation in which the Kingdom of God seemed to be hampered, assailed and even frustrated. Just how clear a grasp John had of Jesus' Messiahship at the time of the baptism is not quite clear. Matt. 3:13ff. and John 1:24ff. seem to indicate a clear perception of the person of Christ, but Luke in his account (3:21-22) does not make any mention of this. John's experience could have been the assailing of his faith by doubts because of a misunderstanding of the pattern of the work of Messiah and of the time it would take. Or it could have been the emerging of deeper and fuller faith as he wrestled with his doubts in the face of what appeared to be an intractable situation. John had called down the fire of judgment on the evil generation with which Christ was now associating so fully. Can we blame the man for feeling Jesus was contradicting, if not disowning, his ministry? But Jesus was not doing this at all. Indeed, Jesus began where John had left off, preaching to those who had listened to John and who by baptism unto



repentance had consented that John's word was right and true and from God. John had to be helped to see that his work, though different from the work of any other man and from the work of Jesus, was still valid and vital.

God must be free to bless in His own way and He neither despises nor devalues any who do His will.

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### **7:24-35**

Jesus' words correct any idea of John being a defective witness or a shallow person, and challenge the people with regard to John's ministry. The prophet was no weak accommodating reed, not a man of personal indulgence nor a showman, but a man on fire for God, as prophesied by Malachi 3:1. He was the greatest of all prophets because he pointed personally to Christ incarnate, while all other prophets could only give promises of One to come. But note that Jesus' testimony to John's greatness, and his limitation, was spoken after John's messengers had departed (24). How wise of Jesus, and how John would have agreed (John 3:30). But what of the last part of v.26? 'He belonged to the period of preparation and had not yet learned to know Jesus as the Crucified One, as the Risen Redeemer, and as the One who through His Spirit makes His habitation in the believer's heart and life. He will indeed, in common with all other saints of the times before Christ's sacrificial death, share fully in the redemption and blessings achieved by Him, but as regards his place in the unfolding of the divine revelation which culminated in Christ, he still belongs to the preparatory stage and is therefore in this respect less than the most insignificant believer of the New Dispensation - the period which began with the drawing near of the beneficent dominion of God in the coming and redeeming work of Jesus'.(Geldenhuys) When God sends a mighty preacher amongst men there are but two results (29-30). Either men receive the message, however solemn, and so are led on into the fuller reaches of the message of grace, or they refuse the message, closing the door to further progress and thereby they frustrate or reject the purpose of God concerning themselves.

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### **7:24-35**

Jesus recognised that people can make the precious message of the Gospel into a worthless thing and He likened them to spoilt, petulant children who out of sheer unreasoning stubbornness refuse whatever is said. They do not want to hear, whether the word is spoken in cheerful attractiveness or in solemn warning. It is the same today. People say the preaching is either too long, too short (not in certain churches), too serious, too superficial, too doctrinal, or too practical. 'All of which reveals so plainly that it is not Jesus they want at all, but a characterless creature who will dress himself up to please their whims and never dare say a plain word to cut across their darling sins' (W. Still). The Jews 'found John too unsociable to be sane and Jesus too sociable to be moral'(Caird). It seems they found themselves perfect beyond any need of change or benefit. Little wonder they found nothing in Jesus. But this is no criticism of, let alone denial of, the message of the Gospel. It is wisdom to confront people with the truth in different ways at different times and in different situations. There is a limitless application of the truth and God (wisdom) is justified by the ultimate fruit. An example of that fruit is given in the next story.

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### **7:36-50**

What a marvellous story; marvelous for sinners such as this woman who is found weeping at the feet of the Jesus who came to bear away her sins in His own body on the tree. Think only of the woman today. Her name is kept secret (thank God!) but her immoral life had been public knowledge. There is no reason to believe she had ever spoken to Jesus, but obviously she had heard His words and they had melted her heart into penitence and hope. She came with other bystanders through the customary open doors at such a feast, and stood behind Jesus who would have been reclining on a low couch with His feet behind Him. Jesus did not turn round to the woman although He knew what was being done and why. The shocked face of the Pharisee across the table would tell Him all He needed to know of public opinion, both secular and ecclesiastical. But a work of God's grace had already been done secretly in her heart. Her life had been changed and her desire was to show her gratitude. It is amazing that such a woman dared to enter the Pharisee's house at all, and wonderful that her tears

washed Jesus' feet before she could even open the box or bottle of ointment. Jesus' words in v.47-48 were all she needed to hear to confirm to herself and to others that she was forgiven and accepted. What a story!

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### **7:36-50**

People see different things as they look at the same picture. Simon saw only a prostitute, while Jesus saw a person full of penitence and shame. Simon saw offensive emotion in the tears and the unacceptable action of such a woman touching Jesus, a thing Simon would never have allowed the woman to do to him, lest he be defiled. Simon saw what he thought was confirmation of all his doubts about Jesus (39) when no sharp condemnation came from

Jesus' lips. What Simon had never yet seen was his own sin, and consequently he could not understand the warm wonder of the woman's rejoicing in pardoning, healing, restoring love. It seems quite clear that the Pharisee's invitation to Jesus, while quite genuine, was cold and formal, because it lacked all the gestures of real welcome (44-46). Why he invited Jesus we cannot tell. Perhaps it was to learn, or to spy, to advise or to criticise. Perhaps he was taken aback that Jesus accepted in spite of the general hostility of the Pharisees towards His ministry. The whole story exposes the difference in heart between the Pharisee and the forgiven sinner. Jesus said by way of summary (v.47), 'Her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven' (NEB). The words in v.48, 50 would be of inestimable power to the woman in her rehabilitation in society and in her establishment in newness of life. 'Go into peace' is indeed a wonderful word.

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### **8:1-3**

This reading centres on the active service of the women. The women stayed loyal right to Golgotha (John 19:25) and even to the sepulchre, for both the burial and the resurrection (Lk. 23:49-24:10). Little wonder there tend to be more women than men in congregations; they see deeper, and respond more fully, not only in genuine emotion as in yesterday's passage but also in quiet, unostentatious practical service as here. Throughout Jesus' systematic visitation of the various communities these women provided for Him and His disciples. They did so because of what Christ had done for them. That is the mainspring of all service, and if we were only more aware of all we owe to this Jesus, and to His people, we would be far more eagerly willing to serve, even if we were never to receive any recognition at all. We do it for Him! And as the story makes plain He was poor, needing such ministrations, for He would not use His divine power to provide for Himself. We are given details only about Mary Magdalene whose life had been beset by, indeed possessed by, a particular intensity of evil or by repeated manifestations of evil. While we cannot state categorically what form this demon-possession took, it seems that the number seven indicates diversity of manifestation, possibly in extremes of personality and behaviour. The fact that they were cast out (Mk. 16:9) makes plain their rule over the woman and her helplessness until the word of Christ's authority banished them. Little wonder Mary wanted to stay close to Jesus. He was for her the mighty conqueror of evil.

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### **8:4-10**

If John the Baptist had been perplexed by the method of outworking of Jesus' ministry (7:19), it is reasonable to suppose that others, including the disciples, would likewise be puzzled. Later in this Gospel (17:20) we are told that the kingdom does not come on a level of outward show, with evidences to be observed and statistically collated. If this were so there would be no place for faith; all would be sight (2 Cor. 5:7). How then is the presence or absence of faith demonstrated? One way adopted by Jesus at this stage of His ministry was teaching by parables, giving clear explanation why He was doing so. Read Matt. 13: 10-17, 34-35; Mk. 4:10-12, 33-34, then the quotation used from Isaiah 6:9-10. This last quotation is also used in John 12:37-41 to explain the unbelief of the Jews, before whose eyes so many miracles had been done. We do not seek in any sense to deny the 'given-ness' of faith, nor the absolute sovereignty of the grace of God in the work of salvation, which includes enlightenment as to the truth. But on the other hand we do not seek to say that in sending a spirit of judicial blindness upon many people God is deliberately preventing them from seeing the truth. From the references quoted it seems that Jesus used the parabolic method because He was surrounded by a crowd,

governed by incipient hostility and established in deliberate refusal of His person and ministry. In this sense the parables serve to confirm their blindness, for while such 'stories' and 'illustrations' would increase the spiritual knowledge of the disciples, they would increasingly baffle the others. Only the earnest and deliberate seeker would find the truth. Even here there is mercy, for in withholding light our Lord reduced responsibility and prevented the accumulation of judgment. Who knows but that later, in an awakening of the Spirit, those blind hearers might find the truth once despised flaming into light.

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### **8:4-10**

Even parables, as all other ministry of the truth, can harden unbelievers as well as lighten believers. This has to be recognised and accepted, as Isaiah and our Lord recognised it in reviewing their respective ministries. Paul also recognised that at one and the same time the ministry of the Word saves and condemns (2 Cor. 2:14-16). But even with those who are saved and who have received an understanding of the secrets of the Kingdom there is still a great responsibility as they listen to Jesus' further ministry. If they will not make the effort to understand, they will lose their capacity (Heb. 5:11ff). That is why Jesus cried aloud in v.8 to ask if people were really listening. Such a word should shock disciples into spiritual awareness, but it will also harden the indifferent and unbelieving hearts of carnal men who simply cannot discern spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14). How we need to cry to God to open people's eyes, for only He can do it. Perhaps the disciples were baffled and disheartened by the evidences of the apparent failure of Jesus' ministry and their own, and the parable meets the need. It was spoken to reassure them that, in spite of all setbacks and failures, the abundant harvest would come in such measure as to make all the labour worthwhile. The parable also warns others that the quality of their response to the truth of the seed of the Word will inevitably, sooner or later, be made quite evident. Jesus' ministry must have been uncomfortable to those who had ears to hear.

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### **8:4-15**

There is tremendous realism in Jesus' words, bringing to light the deep truths of spiritual ministry and revealing the complexities of human hearts. The seed is the Word of God and as such contains a secret principle of life and needs to be hidden for a time in the soil, out of sight, in order that it may root, grow and bring forth its natural fruit. The truer the growth and the fuller the ultimate harvest, the slower will be the growth in terms of visible measurement. Of course, no farmer would go out to sow without preparing the ground, and this is the costly but often forgotten part of ministry. There has to be a clearing of the ground as well as a ploughing by grace (Jer. 1:9-10; 4:3; Hos. 10:12-13). The seed is constant and never changes, but the results of its sowing vary immensely because of the nature and condition of the soil, and while there is no indication that the basic nature of the soil can ever be changed it is clear that the condition of the soil could have been different. However, the message of instruction is a practical one to sowers of the seed, so that they will know what to expect. With some the Word never gets beyond a surface contact with the soil. Jesus says the Devil snatches it away, swooping down swiftly and leaving no trace of the seed. But why was the ground so hard-packed that not a single seed found a crack into which to settle? Ploughed ground can be trampled hard by heedless traffic, and so it is with people's hearts made virtually solid by the ceaseless traffic of the world's affairs and influence. But right alongside there can be ground deeply ploughed and just waiting for the seed. This makes Christian ministry very exciting. Think well, and pray hard for the seed and the soil.

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### **8:4-15**

Much of our disheartening in Christian service comes from wrong expectations and from an optimism that is not really Biblical. Jesus recognises the hardening effect of worldliness but He states quite clearly that the enemy of the seed is the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4). The next picture is of a shallow layer of soil on a rocky ledge, giving the seed a chance to root and encouragement to grow quickly, as the underlying rock would reflect back the heat of the sun and produce a hothouse effect. Such 'results' are impressive and exciting but there is neither depth nor root. This is the superficial 'pleasurable' attitude to spiritual things which withers away when testing comes. Others again have hearts that are open and hungry to receive the seed of the Word and are serious about

the things of God. But these hearts and lives are cluttered with the rank growth of worldly weeds, which battle against the growing seed for the available nourishment and space. Few of us really recognise the virulent danger of all that is meant by worldliness, and it is time we recognised that 'the world' is not neutral but antagonistic to spiritual growth and discipleship (1 John 2:15-17; 5:19; Rom. 12:2; John 17:6-18). This worldly spirit is operative when Jesus is simply one of many interests, and there are competitive loyalties by which He is sooner or later edged out.

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### **8:4-15**

But over against all the inevitable disappointment there is that perfect harvest. Luke does not mention the thirtyfold, or sixtyfold, but only the hundredfold which, being perfect, more than balances the 'failures'. The honest and good heart cannot refer to moral goodness, since the Gospel is addressed to sinners. Honesty and goodness are fruits of the Word rather than prerequisites of hearing it. May there not be an indication here of the sovereign working of God's Holy Spirit by which alone there is the 'hearing of faith'? Think of Lydia in Acts 16:14-15 and of the Gentile converts in Acts 13:48-49. There may be reference in v.15 to that singleness of heart and uncomplicated response that are evident in some from the very first moment they hear the Gospel. The work of grace carries evidence of authenticity right from the start, and subsequent experience confirms it.

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### **8:16-18**

Lest the closing words of yesterday's verses and note be misunderstood and lead to careless ness, Jesus brings this word of warning. The ministry of the Gospel is a devastating and dangerous thing for under it no person can remain neutral, unaffected or unexposed. By its very nature truth has the effect of light, not only to shine in us to expose us but also to shine through us to others. If we walk in the light of God's revealed truth we must not seek in any way to hide the light, nor for that matter to wave it about frantically, but simply to let it shine so that it may do its appointed work. Just what it will work in a mixed company of people we have been learning right through Luke's story of the Gospel. More and more as the disciples were taught in the mysteries of the Kingdom through these parables, they see that the objective is not to hide the truth from men and women but to blaze it into their hearts. But people must be careful how they hear. This message is not something to be trifled with as if the whole thing were a game. And this is not primarily a word to the unconverted but to disciples, for familiarity with the truth can produce a casualness which leads to serious and even incurable backsliding (cf. Heb. 2:1-3, where the reference could be to the truth drifting away from us to become part of the indeterminate background noise of our lives). The effect of the truth, whether in its reception or rejection, is cumulative; our capacity for recognising and receiving the truth growing or diminishing all the time. We need to remember this lest even in our reading of the Bible we become careless!

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### **8:19-21**

These verses should be sweet yet poignant comfort to those who belong to Christ in a family situation where He is neither known nor desired. Jesus speaks about new relationships grounded in and guarded by obedience to the Father's word of salvation. Natural kinship must give place to spiritual claim, not least because all human ties in this world will eventually be severed and only that which is in Christ will abide. Our Lord was the eldest in a big family (Matt. 12:46-50; 13:55-56; Mk. 3:31-35; 6:3; John 2:12) and nowhere does it ever suggest that He failed to care for them with a love most true and tender. But the fact remains He was sorely hurt by them on many occasions such as in this one when they sought to pull Him back from His appointed task because of their unbelief (John 7:1-5; Mk. 3:21). We must never despise the care for us shown by family, especially if we are young in years. We have a duty to family but we must never allow family, actuated by limited and defective considerations because of spiritual blindness and unbelief, to set the limit to our doing the will of God. Family will misunderstand and will no doubt think us selfish in pursuing 'our interests' rather than devoting our selves to them and 'their interests'. What they can not or will not see is that Jesus is not a hobby or interest but a sovereign commander who has called us, and from whom we cannot go back, even if we wanted to, which we do not. The hope and prayer of our hearts is that by our life among our family and friends they may yet see Jesus



as He is and yield to Him as we have done. It is not easy, but it is in some way a fellowship in the sufferings of Christ.

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### **8:22-25**

This is the first of three stories about storm and calm which reveal both the malicious antagonism of the Devil against Christ, His work, His men and all humanity; and also the total Mastery of Christ over all the powers and every circumstance of evil. Read here Mark 4:35-41, not least to note that there were other little ships involved in this mighty miracle of storm and calm. They shared the experience without knowing why it had come about or how it had been dealt with. They were on the perimeter of the experience, but who knows but that by the Holy Spirit's working all they had heard of Jesus' teaching came savingly alive to them in these circumstances that they did not understand. According to Luke the incident began very quietly and innocently, with a tired Jesus committing Himself to the safe care of His own men and sleeping deeply and sweetly in the boat. Of course we could expect Devilish intervention here, not only because on the other side of the sea a sadly tormented man was waiting for the advent of a Saviour, but also because, humanly speaking, the whole future of the work of God, Christ and His men, was in that boat. If it could be smitten now in one fierce assault, the victory would go to the Devil. No doubt the mountain formation around the Sea of Galilee and the tendency to sudden, violent, wind squalls could explain the storm, but its suddenness and its intensity which so alarmed these seasoned fishermen, mark it out as demonic. We need only think of 1 John 5:19 and Rev. 12:12 in a realistic sense to see the validity of this interpretation of the storm. Our belief in the doctrine of the Devil tends to be theoretical, and we must make it practical. In this way we will understand why the progress of the work of the Kingdom often seems to be by way of colossal contradictions. Read Ephesians 6:10-12.

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### **8:22-25**

Yesterday's note does not seek to deny natural scientific causes nor does it suggest that every storm of the elements is necessarily demonic. What we do say is that wherever you have an advancing work of God there will be Satanic storms calculated to demoralise, destroy or distract. Remember the maniac of Gadara waiting! (8:26ff.) Remember also that the disciples were in this crisis because of their determination to stay by the side of their Master. The situation completely bowled them over and it could well have been the sight of the sleeping Jesus as much as the sight of the storm with its feeling of evil that led them into blasphemous doubt about Christ's interest in them (Mk. 4:38). Now, the reason Jesus slept on was simply that there was absolutely no doubt whatever as to the issue, and His body and mind were in need of rest. This was not the time for intense spiritual watchfulness and activity. Would that we could discern needs like this! There is a wonderful simplicity in Jesus' word of power which hushed the storm, and no doubt the disciples were vastly impressed by the miracle. This was indeed mighty working in the power of God. But Jesus' searching question about the absence of faith on the part of His men reveals a very important lesson. It seems Jesus expected them to have been able to ride out the storm, their eyes being on Him, and thus being reassured that victory was theirs even in the storm. Had these men held on in faith they would have seen the blustery storm of Satan blow itself out and their faith would have been the stronger. The miracle was a concession to weakness, as signs and wonders often are. When the fierce storms of irrational doubt engulf us, we need to be calm in our thinking. Do we doubt Christ's willingness and power to see us through? Read Isaiah 26:3-4; 54:17; Deut. 33:27; John 14:1, 27.

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### **8:26-33**

This is the story we love to preach on using the text, 'He is able to save to the uttermost' (Heb. 7:25AV) because it demonstrates so clearly the three dimensions of salvation. This man was saved from what he had done, from what he was and from the alien and invading personal powers of evil, and the final issue was peace. It was peace for the man but the opposite for the inhabitants of Gadara, as we shall see tomorrow. In the calming of the storm in nature and in the man we see the initiative of God's grace in the breaking in of the power and authority of the Kingdom. Here is the mighty Saviour entering Satan's territory and delivering a man from bondage into life. It is beyond the scope of these notes to discuss how the man came into this condition,



and when sin indulged in his life had passed over into possession by multiple demons. The fact that we are not told serves to point a solemn warning to all who would trifle with sin in any form at all. Here is a man whose personality had disintegrated, whose mind and emotions were deranged, and who knew he was in bondage and that, in this bondage from which he had no hope of being freed, he had in fact lost himself. It is difficult in reading the story to know when the man speaks and when the tyrannical demons speak. Here is a case that has gone far beyond natural propensities for evil. This man was possessed by evil spirits. Society could do nothing with him save impose external physical restraint. The man could do nothing to help himself and his life became more and more one of isolation, lostness, darkness and fear. Then Jesus came and before Him devils fear and fly, and sin's dominion is ended. Isn't there a hymn that says, 'What He's done for others, He'll do for you.' He is able!

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### **8:26-33**

Satan, his demons, and all we mean by sin are full of bluster and bravado when they are in the ascendant but the moment they are faced with their Master, their cowardly, craven mongrel-like spirit comes out into the open and we find the demons here bleating for compassionate treatment. Before being too critical of them think how often we are ruthless to others and then in our own troubles go weeping to God for kindness and care and comfort. There is something very far wrong in that attitude, something devilish rather than Christ-like. Note that in v.31 the demons entreated Christ, thereby giving clear acknowledgment of His unquestioned superiority in power over them. These restless, frightened demons dreaded the return to the abyss or deep, the 'abode of demons during this earthly dispensation' and were prepared to settle for embodiment in the swine since they knew they were to be banished from the man. But, being granted their request, and evil being essentially self-destructive, the demons panicked the beasts which rush to their death and so, deprived of any bodily 'residence', they returned to their own dreaded, undesirable abode. The terror of the demons in this, as well as the man's terrible plight, exposes the intrinsic lie of the Devil when he suggests that his ways are desirable. The story also tells us that sinful possibility is not exhausted by actual human sin, because we are limited in personality by our bodily existence and capacity. Evil is spirit, and given entrance can steal or obliterate personality and produce grotesque tragedies like this man. Perhaps we should think of the maniac as one of the Devil's failures, and look for his successes in higher realms where evil is seen in its numinous, fascinating, hypnotic power.

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### **8:34-39**

In yesterday's verses the young man, torn apart by inner conflict and contradiction of evil, first heard the command of Jesus and then instantaneously the gracious and kindly question, 'What is your name?' Jesus sought to call forth some response from the real man hidden under this huge load of accumulated disintegration. Since the man's life had been subjected for a long time to the organised campaign of evil (Matt. 12:43-45) in which he was only a pawn or tool, this identification of himself as a real person of some value to another must have been like a ray of light shining into his dark, bleak soul. He had never known this before, certainly not from his contemporaries who may well have been the means of leading him into his first trafficking with evil. Could any artist in any medium ever capture this wonderful meeting and conversation? Incarnate kindness meets human hopelessness and calls forth a man to begin to live again.

'Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,  
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;  
Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,  
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.' ( From the hymn 'Rescue the perishing by van Alostane).

Think well of the transformation wrought by the saving kindness of Jesus, for it is the focus of the passage and highlights its truth.

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### 8:34-39

The care men had for the swine far exceeded their care for or interest in this poor man, and it seems certain that the message carried to the city and country (note how widespread their testimony was) concerned the disaster that befell the pigs and not the transformation that had come to the notorious man. Here we see how the advent of a Saviour challenges vested interests and the profit motive, and produces an ultimatum. They heard the story, saw the evidence in the man and, according to Mark 5:16, they were reminded about the lost pigs! But Luke seems to emphasise that their real fear arose from the sight of a hitherto useless, dangerous man restored to humanity, sanity, balance, peace and grace. Why should this be? Is it not simply that men do not like a God who comes too near, since this will mean an interference with and transformation of their selfishly governed lives? The same spirit is seen in the attitude of many in power towards biblical, evangelical ministries. That they work cannot be denied, but it is inconvenient to policy and therefore such works of God have to be denigrated, decried, devalued and, if possible, got rid of. This is what the people of Gadara did. They asked Jesus to go, and He went away! But a witness was left behind, a living witness, which over the years would testify against the unbelief of this community that rejected such a Saviour. Think of the challenge to this new convert. He was to witness to men who could adjust to living with demons but not to living with Jesus. The 'sane' people in the story are seen to be more under the dominion of evil than the man we call the maniac. What a story!

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### 8:40-56

True to the pattern of life two stories here are intertwined. This alone is a lesson we must learn. God is seldom, if ever, concentrating His attention solely on us as individuals, however urgent or anxious we may feel the situation to be. Of course, that He delays in order to meet the need of another does not mean He is careless or forgetful of us. Indeed God's delays are always designs of mercy. Never forget this. The passage begins with a crowd eager to receive Jesus, a massive contrast to what we have read of in Gadara. But we must not be beguiled by the numbers or the enthusiasm, for the important thing is the individuals in that crowd who were intent on having direct personal dealings with Christ. It was astonishing that a ruler of the synagogue should come publicly to Jesus in spite of all the adverse religious opinion about Him. It was marvellous that an outcast woman should come, and indeed be able to come pushing through the milling throng, since she was certainly weak and debilitated by her illness. Both persons were desperately earnest; both were compelled by personal crisis; both felt that this was their last hope, but they came to Jesus by very different routes. Jairus had known twelve years of family delight when it was all shattered by sudden crisis of the kind he dreaded most, the possible loss of his only child. The woman had known twelve years of weary, baffling struggle, as much an outcast from society and religion as Jairus was accepted and respected. The point is that both these people came to Jesus only as a last resort. What if Jesus had not been within reach? Be thankful that there is a silent providence operating in grace to bring us to Christ even though we often misunderstand it and even rebel against it.

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### 8:40-56

There is a perfection in our Lord's dealings with this woman, who was in fact acting against her own best interest by trying to keep secret her faith in and her dealings with Jesus. According to Levitical law (Lev. 15:19ff) this woman was unclean, was forbidden to touch anyone because her uncleanness would be communicated to them. In spite of this she came and touched Jesus' garment, not because she believed His robe was 'magic' but to give herself some tangible reassurance that her desperate faith had in fact laid hold on the Son of God. Jesus later confirmed that it was her faith in Himself that had healed her (48). Now note that Jesus was aware that one person in the crowd had come to Him in a way different from mere interest and He knew that a miracle of salvation had been worked which involved power going out from Him. In this sense, miracles are not easy; nor is true spiritual service! Had the woman been allowed to go away in secret she might well have suffered some relapse through a sense of guilt at having done the forbidden thing, or have lived the rest of her days with a 'secret' salvation and would never have been accepted by the society in which she lived. In either case her 'salvation' would have been narrower and less powerfully satisfying than it might have been, and for this reason Jesus compelled her to come out into the open, against her will, and she confessed her faith

before Him and the whole crowd . The effect of this was to confirm her faith, assure her of salvation, make totally personal her encounter with Jesus, and open the way for her future life of service and witness. Jesus' insistence on countering her desire to slip away into the irresponsibility of anonymity had led her to the gates of life. Read Luke 12:8-9; Rom. 10:8-17.

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### **8:40-56**

All Jairus' religious affiliations, his friends and social position, were against his coming to Jesus; but he came. Of course it took the impending death of his only child to bring it about! But this is not the only apparent hardness in the story. Think of Jairus' hurt anxiety and exasperation as Jesus delayed with this 'common' woman! Did Jairus think he was a 'better' client for Jesus' interest and power? Like all of us, Jairus' interest was selfishly centred on his own home, but to engage the Son of God to solve a family crisis is not the same as coming to Him in saving faith which leads to the surrender of the life. Jairus had many things to learn, among them the fact that death is not the worst thing that could happen. He saw the whole happening of the healing of a life-time of disease and watched the woman go in peace. What a reassurance this must have been and what hopes it must have raised. But then the news comes that the child had in fact died. This was the crisis point, and Jesus faced the man with the challenge: 'Trust Me.' 'Believe in Me.' 'Put yourself into My hands.' And, as if to encourage Jairus, Jesus immediately resumed the broken journey. But think of the conflict of emotion in Jairus' mind and heart on the long walk to his home. Was it all vain? Why had Jesus delayed? What would he say to his wife? Was it any use believing? But all this was balanced by the calm composure of the Man by his side whose whole demeanour signified complete command and total absence of doubt. The arrival at the house, the wailing of the mourners, the tears of his wife, the still figure on the bed, the mocking laughter meeting Jesus' words, must all have battled with that challenge, 'Trust Me'. Then when scornful unbelief was excluded, the little girl was raised from the dead with amazing simplicity and the first thing she saw was her parents standing with Jesus. How wonderful!

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### **9:1-5**

We are coming near to the crisis point in Luke's story because at 9:51 we find Jesus setting His face to go to Jerusalem. From this point the story is concerned with the last six months of our Lord's life and ministry. We read here of the first time Jesus sent out men in His name to do His work with power and authority given to them. This was not a sudden commissioning to service, for in 5:1-11 we had their call; in 6:13-19 the choice of twelve (Mark 3:13-19 emphasises they were called to be with Jesus); in 8:10 they were taught the mysteries of the Kingdom; and only now are they sent out. Perhaps we see why the converted man of Gadara was not at once enlisted as a member of the evangelistic team. He had first to learn in a thorough-going sense the truth and power of the Lord's salvation and to begin his ministry at home, as indeed the disciples were commanded to do after the Ascension (Acts 1:8). It is very wise counsel not to be precipitate in calling people to responsible service (1 Tim. 5:22; 2 Tim. 2:2). We must have the long-term view of their capacity and dependability, and sometimes it appears very soon that some do not really understand the spirit and objective of their calling (Lk. 9:49-56). But here there seems to have been an element of urgency which compelled the use of these men at once as "fellow labourers in the Gospel". The unremitting demands of the crowd and the territory to be covered before the set time of Jesus' death needed this campaign of missionary strategy (Matt. 10:23). Time is always short and the call of discipleship is to run and fight, not to stroll and speculate (Eph. 5:14-16; Rom. 13:12-14).

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### **9:1-5**

In Mark 6:7 we are told Jesus sent His men out in pairs, a wise method seeing they were in many ways still novices. Think of Eccles. 4:9-10 in the light of the desolation that overtook the great Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-5. Think also of our Lord's awareness of need for fellowship in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36ff) and of the pattern of the Spirit's working in Acts 13:1-4. Compare this with Paul's costly loneliness in 2 Tim. 4:9-18. Not many of us are strong enough to stand alone and many prove limited in service partly because of a refusal to submit to the discipline of loneliness when the Lord calls for it. These men were sent out to herald (preach, v.2, in v.6 it is

evangelise) the kingdom of God and were given power and authority, that is, enabling and the right to use that authority. Note that Jesus trusted them with power, believing it would neither distract them by pride in awareness of it, nor become an end in itself. They would meet and indeed provoke outbursts of evil but they were not to be worried, for the message of the Kingdom which they preached is true. The King has come and He does reign in power unto salvation, neither men nor devils being able to withstand Him (Phil. 2:8,11; Heb. 2:7-10; Rev. 19:5-6). The whole world order does lie in the wicked one (1 John 5:19) but Jesus Himself declares our victory (John 16:33 cf. 1. John 4:4). Note the charge to care for people in their need as well as to seek to save their souls. The provisions, or lack of them in v.3-4, serve to underline the urgency of the whole matter. It is all too easy to spend so long evolving elaborate plans and schemes that the actual venture never gets launched. But they that know their God get on with it (Dan. 11:32). This is when the world begins to take notice and believe that the issues are important.

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### **9:6-9**

The preaching of the good news and the exercise of works of mercy were carried out as Jesus had commanded, and the end result was that the people, including the rulers, had their attention focused radically on Jesus. There is something devastating about the Word of God preached in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. It searches out the consciences of men, even hardened men, in a way that preaching carried out in the vehement passion of the flesh can never do. Herod became aware that there was no escape from God. He was perplexed and ill at ease. He had executed the servant of the Messiah, John the Baptist, and had assumed that that was the end of the preaching of this particular message of a Kingdom being at hand. But he was wrong. Having brutalised the servant he was now faced with the Master, even Jesus. He was disturbed, as well he might be, considering the life he lived in defiance of the Law of God. The speculative interpretations of Jesus' person and ministry were many, as v.7-8 and 18-19 indicate, but Herod's was that of self-interest. His desire to see Jesus was in order to satisfy himself that he might go on living in sin, his conscience about the Baptist's murder having been stilled. As time went on it seems Herod's intentions became murderous (13:31) and in the end when he faced Jesus (23:8-9) there was no word whatever for him. Herod mocked Christ, dismissed him and befriended his old enemy Pilate. But in the end Herod faced God, and there was no escape.

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### **9:10-17**

Bethsaida referred to here is situated just outside the territory of Herod, and if we read Mk. 6:7-32 we will sense the atmosphere of danger which necessitated this withdrawal of the disciples. This reason is not actually stated, possibly because the disciples would have been too elated by the experiences of their mission to be amenable to caution. The last thing Jesus wanted here was a confrontation with the secular powers of Herod. But the crowd followed them to their retreat and were taught and healed. Then as the day wore on, need became more consciously clamant. The disciples' suggestion to send the people away possibly stemmed more from an awareness of their own tiredness and a desire for the refreshment of fellowship with the Master than from indifference to the people's need. The crowd on their part were so conscious of their need that they had no thought for the tiredness of Jesus or the disciples. Such a situation, played upon by Satan, could well have developed into one of friction and while the disciples were still puzzling and worrying over what was to be done, they were given the command to feed the multitude. Three clear miracles are then apparent. First the orderly managing of the tired, hungry, emotional crowd by a handful of stewards is astonishing. Then the disciples finding they had energy enough and to spare to tackle a mighty job when humanly speaking they were past it is the second wonder. Finally the multiplying of the loaves and fishes in such a way that all were satisfied is the third miracle, confirmed by the twelve baskets full that remained. Would the disciples ever forget?

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### **9:10-17**

In all four Gospels this miracle is described and presented as the climax of our Lord's public ministry in which He took His farewell of the crowd, and from which point He concentrated on His death. Mk. 6:34 adds one element to the story and John 6:5-9 gives yet further details. Then in John 6:26-59 we have our Lord's sermon



of application arising from the miracle. In our minds, we can scarcely separate this meal from the sacramental meal that speaks of the Saviour's death. That is John's message. But here we note the lessons the disciples learned. They were the ones to feed the multitude, and the word is still to us in spiritual and material terms, "You give them something to eat." They were aware of their poverty which seemed to make action impossible yet Jesus took what they had, multiplied it in abundance, and left them at the end with a whole basketful each. There is always more than enough when Jesus blesses. This is the essence of Christian service. Our Lord in divine omnipotence takes what we have and causes it to increase to meet the need and leaves us provided for, so that we are ready for the next demand of service. Never reduce the miracles to mere material wonders. See their purpose and, most of all, see Him who works the miracles. He is indeed the sovereign Lord and in a moment of time He compresses all we mean by ploughing, sowing, growing, harvesting, milling and baking in order to feed people. Miracles are simple when God is big.

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### **9:18-22**

A considerable lapse of time must be recognised between the last miracle and this new passage. It seems Luke was eager to get to grips with the last six months of our Lord's life and the significant crisis point in v.51. The result is to give us this chapter simply crammed with incident, and we would do well to read quickly to the end of the chapter before studying today's verses. The time being critical and Jesus now moving resolutely forward to His victorious conflict, He was concerned to prepare His men for all that would come upon them. This seems to be the significance of this incident which gives one of Luke's seven references to our Lord's prayer life (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:29; 11:1; 22:41). There is no contradiction between His being alone in prayer and the disciples being with Him. It was so in Gethsemane. The crowds obviously recognised Jesus as a unique Person come indeed from God yet essentially like other prophets before Him. No doubt some of the cross-currents of popular thought influenced the disciples and they had to be brought to a point of clear recognition and confession. Peter's answer on behalf of the group signified that our Lord's ministry had in fact done its work by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 16: 16-17). Note that the disciples passed on to Jesus only the favourable comments on His person and ministry. They did not rub salt into the wounds caused by the slander people had spoken, calling Him a mere joiner from an obscure village, an unlearned man, an imposter, somewhat mad and possibly in league with the devil! The nastiest things were said of course by religious people! The disciples had grasped the truth, though not perfectly, and must now be prepared for the death of the Christ.

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### **9:18-22**

It would have been dangerous and inflammatory for the disciples to make public the truth about Christ's Messiahship, for the people would understand it wrongly and start a political revolution (John 6:15). We also must be wise about what we say and when we say it, remembering that our own understanding is always limited. Now the disciples were told very plainly of the divine necessity of the death of the Messiah; not death at the hand of a wild and unruly mob conditioned by malicious propaganda by priestly rulers, but a destined death in the perfect redeeming purpose of God, at the right time and in fulfilment of ancient prophecy (Acts 2: 22-23; Gal, 4:4-5; Isa. 53). How fully Jesus prepared His men for the Cross and for the resurrection to follow, and had they only grasped the truth their experience in these dark days of death would have been so much lighter. Mark tells us (Mark. 8:32-33) that at this mighty spiritual moment Peter took Jesus roughly by the shoulder and contradicted Him. That alone reveals how offensive was the thought of the Cross even to those closest to the Master. When Jesus rebuked Peter, He did so because this man, operating from the inner position of a close friend, was trying to do exactly what the Devil had tried to do in the wilderness at the outset of Christ's ministry, namely to turn Him away from God's appointed way of salvation. But in Jesus' mind and heart the issue was settled. There was to be no carnal precipitation nor equally carnal reticence. It was costly (Lk: 12:50) not least because of the lack of understanding of His own disciples (Mark 10:35-41) and the despised rejection at the hands of His own nation. The religious hierarchy scrutinised His claims and rejected Him out of hand. He was indeed a Man of Sorrows.

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### 9:23-27

There is only one way to be with Christ and part of His glorious and victorious Kingdom and that is the way of the Cross, a way that cuts right across all our human ideas and desires. To deny oneself is not just a case of giving up a few trifles that can well be done without (although most of us could get rid of a lot that simply hinders life and witness). It means to give up "self" together with all its claims and interests, to forget that we have rights, to cancel out all our claims. To take up the cross is not just to put up with problems, inner or outward, nor to learn to live with ourselves as we really are, although all that is healthily valid. The Cross is an instrument of death and if we would follow Christ we must die to self in a living, oft-repeated death. It is the way the Master went and we must follow Him. The "Cross" is the scorn, persecution, suffering and self-sacrifice that come as a result of faith in and obedience to Christ. Jesus goes on to say that to keep "self" for ourselves is nothing but spiritual suicide, whereas to give up "self" for Christ's sake is the beginning of life. Of course, a sacrifice once laid on the altar is irretrievable. It is for God. When people say this is too radical and costly, the answer of v.25 must be given and reference made to Luke 12:13-21. Worldliness is tenable only if this world is all that there is to experience. But we live our lives in the light of the coming glory of God, and because of this we are faced with the issue of taking sides with Christ and declaring it. It is all so very reasonable. Those who disown Christ and decline to be His shall in the day of His glory be disowned, that is they shall be marked out for what they are, rejecters of God's Son. How solemn!

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### 9:28-36

This is the fourth of the seven crisis points in Jesus' life, the others being His birth, baptism, temptation, cross, resurrection and ascension. It comes after our Lord's public ministry had been fulfilled and before He moved forward to His lonely Cross in company with His chosen men. Note that Jesus took the chosen three. There was no request on their part and possibly no awareness of significance in the happening, as indeed there was no knowledge yet of the particular part they were to play in the future work of the Gospel. Matt. 17:2 and Mark 9:2 both emphasise that Jesus was transfigured *before them*, in their conscious experience, so much so that Peter was able later to testify to it (2 Pet. 1:15-18, a marvellous passage!). It seems clear that this astonishing happening was every bit as much for the disciples' sake as for Jesus' sake. Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, the whole Old Testament economy, spoke with Jesus of the death (the "exodus" is the word, a saving death) He would accomplish. It confirmed to our blessed Lord that all the generations of Old Testament saints had died in faith, believing that the Christ would come in the fulness of time and ratify their faith unto salvation. (This emphasis on the retrospective aspect of the Cross, validating all the symbolic sacrifices of the old economy, is spoken of in Rom 3:25. ) But Moses and Elijah were encouraging rather than challenging, and there was total harmony about the issue. The exodus would be accomplished. If only the disciples had been able to remember this at the time of the Cross! Then they would not have panicked, for they would have known that this broken body on the tree was the Lord of Glory.

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### 9:28-36

This is rich ground and we must explore it to the full. Marvellous as this transfiguration was, we must allow that similar sights might have been seen many a night as Jesus prayed alone in communion with the Father. But, keeping in mind that Jesus was now preparing His men for His death, we can say that on this occasion He took the chosen three and led them behind the scenes of earthly activity to see things as they really were. Later, when Hell was growling its ferocious enmity and men seemed to be inspired by evil and operating without restraint, they would need to remember what they had seen and understand the death of the Son of God as a work of deliberate victory and not a disaster or defeat. We may feel that a great privilege was given to these three men and that is no doubt true. But was it given because they were spiritually strong or to retrieve them from spiritual weakness? It is clear that they missed the point of the whole thing, Satan snatching the truth out of their minds and hearts because (as we shall see later) of their pride. We must not be too critical of these three who were overwhelmed by the incomprehensible. (Who are we to criticise others for lack of spirituality?) But we must ask when exactly they fell asleep. Was it not during Christ's long session of prayer, an exercise that can be unimpressive to outward eyes because it seems so divorced from the business of life and service. Then when the

glory shone they were startled awake and they wanted to keep the glory. That is why they wanted to build a retreat! But what of the dark, needy world below that waited for a Saviour? For the second time the Lord of glory turned His back on both position and privilege and went down to such a world as this (Phil. 2:1-8).

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### 9:28-36

The glory seen in the transfigured Jesus (remember that later He was the same "ordinary" Jesus) can be understood in two ways, both of which make plain that it was glory shining out from Him rather than down on Him from heaven. While He prayed "His divine majesty shone so gloriously through His human nature that even His raiment glistened in a white glow," (Geldenhuys) On the other hand we could say it was in fact the glory of a perfect man that shone out. Here was man as God had first planned (Gen. 1:26-31), truly human, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. God gave testimony as to His pleasure in this Man. Now, Jesus in His own right as a man could have claimed entrance into Heaven there and then. Death had no claim on Him for He had no sin. God had nothing against Him because Jesus had no sin. It was such a man who entered the counsels of the glory of Heaven as man's representative and substitute, and, for our sake, turned His face to go to Jerusalem. These thoughts link the saving intentions of eternity with the saving work of earth, for the Lamb who died on Calvary was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev.13:8). This story also shows us that history is not shattered bits and pieces of meaninglessness, but one coherent movement with the Cross at its heart. Moses and Elijah, 1500 and 900 years respectively after their departure from this world, were seen to be alive in another world, (perhaps the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb. 12:23) and were reclothed in shape and form for this holy conversation, the substance and significance of which they understood perfectly. Think of Moses and Elijah when Christ finally cried from the Cross "It is finished," declaring the end of sin's dominion. The veil of the temple was torn in two on earth, and in Heaven these two men, on the basis of Christ's perfect atonement, entered into the nearer presence of God, together with all those who had lived and died in faith, waiting for the coming of the Saviour.

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### 9:28-36

The final lesson here concerns the disciples who were startled into positive reaction by the fading of the glory and the departure of the heavenly visitors. We could read here Exodus 34:27-35 and Paul's use of the incident in 2 Cor. 3:7-18. Note that the disciples who were still not attracted to the idea of suffering are nevertheless quite fascinated by the glory, although the two are never to be separated (Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Tim. 2:12). We can well imagine the reaction of the disciples when the Shekinah cloud, signifying God's presence, lifted and they saw no-one except Jesus, and the ordinary Jesus at that. It was Peter who wanted to perpetuate the experience, not understanding how disastrous that would be, for two reasons: firstly, Jesus would have remained in glory and there would have been no Cross, and secondly there would have been no further spiritual growth in grace on the part of Peter and his companions. Think back to the loss in long-term spiritual experience when faith failed and a miracle of reassurance and deliverance was needed in the stilling of the storm. In like manner such an experience as these three men had on the mountain, if maintained visibly or if repeated regularly, would have become a mainstay of their life and loyalty to Christ, without which they would crumple into confusion, as Peter did here. "In the life of the believer the most wonderful spiritual experiences are the exception and of short duration. But our Redeemer and Lord is and always remains with and close to us." (Geldenhuys) We must walk by faith, not by sight, and we must remember that even the best of experiences, such as the Transfiguration, if misunderstood will set us at cross-purposes with God and will tend to keep us on the mountain when the valley is crying out for men and women who know God and are usable in the salvation and deliverance of many.

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### 9:37-45

At the same time as the experience of glory, this tragic story was being enacted in the valley in a way that exposed the defects of the disciples. They had already been given power (9:1), and had in fact exercised that power (9:10), but their onetime fruitfulness had become stagnant. Why? In Mark 9:14 we are told all that happened was a religious argument which the disciples were not winning. The boy's need and the father's

anguish were both forgotten. Were the nine disciples in the valley too obsessed with and distracted by wondering what was happening on the mountain? The return of the other three made no difference. Read on to the end of this chapter and then turn to Mark 9:10-29 and Matthew 17:14-21. Lord, save us from ourselves, and grant us a truly humble heart that will wait, and learn and trust. Lord, teach us to pray, and not to fall asleep.

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### **9:46-48**

There is a sense of urgency in the second half of this chapter indicated by the words "and it came to pass," in v.37, 51, 57(AV). The story is pressing on from incident to incident, each small cameo having a great lesson to teach against the background of the demonstrated powerlessness of the disciples. Today's verses pinpoint the connection between pride and powerlessness. These men were obsessed with themselves and it was this which kept them from grasping Jesus' repeated teaching about His coming death. To these men greatness consisted of place and recognition, and we cannot help wondering if (in spite of Jesus' caution to keep it to themselves) Peter, James and John had later spoken about or at least hinted at the glorious experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. Perhaps these three excluded themselves from the public failure of the disciples' group in respect of the sick boy. After all, they had not been present. But on their return Jesus had not entrusted the work of healing to them knowing that they too were powerless. True greatness is not found in self-assertive comparison and competition, but in humility of service that comes down to the side of need, however insignificant, for Jesus' sake. From Matt. 18:1 it seems that after their private argument the disciples came to Jesus to settle the issue of precedence among themselves. In Mk. 9:33-34 the disciples were taken aback by Jesus' knowledge of their inward thoughts. In John 13:1-17 we see all of them holding back from doing the menial task. Where self reigns, prayer is stifled and power is absent!

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### **9:49-50**

Where self reigns jealousy and intolerance will be present. John, missing the point of the lesson, fastened on the reference to the least being great and in claiming humility he exposed his pride. What right has anyone whose powerlessness has been revealed and rebuked to rebuke and forbid another whose power, in Christ's name, is effective? It is usually the least fruitful and least consistent people who indulge in criticism, doing so from the position of "belonging" to the select company of Jesus' people. Our Lord here commands us to suspend our judgment on the service of others and indeed to give them credit for being the servants of the Lord every bit as much as we are. This is not to devalue the fellowship of the men Jesus had gathered round Him, but to make that fellowship such a valid and living thing that "lone-ranger" servants of the Master might be-drawn into the benefit, blessing and increase of that fellowship. But in its condition of pride and powerlessness would it have been good for this unknown disciple who used the name of Jesus with a degree of effectiveness to come into the fellowship of men who were so manifestly out of fellowship with Jesus? We need to be very careful that we do not exercise a ministry of discouragement, reducing others to our own low level of understanding and service.

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### **9:49-50**

That there is such a thing as Christian intolerance is clear from Gal. 1:6-12; 2:11-14, and we must all be prepared to do battle for the substance of the faith. But there is an intolerance which is quite contrary to the spirit of Christ and reveals a false zeal. That the unknown disciple was successful in his ministry of exorcism in the name of Jesus was acknowledged by the "inner-core" disciples and it seems they were jealous of the man's success. But they had no right whatever to pass judgment (see Rom. 14:1-5, though the context is different). Jesus made it plain His men had acted wrongly, having failed to discern the spirit motivating the unknown and perhaps poorly taught disciple. The statement of v.50 must be compared with the opposite statement in Luke 11:23. "In this latter instance the Saviour is speaking of the conflict with the Evil One. And in that conflict there is no room for neutrality. But in v.50 it is a question of someone who believed in Jesus to such an extent; that he cast out demons in His name and who revealed such a humble attitude that he allowed the disciples to forbid him to continue the work. Although his faith and attachment to Christ were not perfect, he nevertheless acted in honour of Christ." (Geldenhuys) If this man was all he appeared to be he would without doubt in due time find

himself integrated into the believing fellowship. It is not a case of accepting everything "spiritual" at face value. We are commanded to put the spirits to the test (1 John 4:1) and we neglect this charge at our peril, for the Devil is a deceiver and very plausibly religious (2 Cor. 11:13-15). But we must learn humility since Jesus has many different servants working in many ways. Let us test *ourselves* by Luke 11:23 and test *others* when it is our business so to do by Luke 9:50.

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### 9:51-56

From this point, Luke is emphasising our Lord's progress toward Jerusalem and His death on the Cross (17:11; 18:31; 19:28,41). Our Lord's "determination to die" for the salvation of sinners highlights the enormity of the pride of the disciples in their angry reaction towards those who had failed to recognise them and give them their place. Other references to Samaria in the gospels are John 4:4,9, 39-42; Luke 10:30ff. It was Jesus' set intention to go to Jerusalem that evoked the definite rejection by the Samaritans. They had their own attitude to spiritual things and wanted no part in anything to do with Jerusalem, even when God incarnate desired to come amongst them. This was too much for the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17) and they wanted a judgment similar to that in 2 Kings 1:9-11. It would have been an interesting but devastating exposure of the two proud men if Jesus had given them permission to call for fire from heaven. Could men who failed to see the extensive grace of God (v.50) possibly summon such fiery activity from God? But Jesus' concern is not to destroy nor humiliate Samaritans or disciples but to save, and through His clear rebuke He taught His men yet another lesson in discipleship. There is no place for offended pride nor harsh retaliation in the service of a Saviour who "won the world through shame, and beckons us His road" (F.W.Faber). This is our example in all situations and at all times (1 Pet. 2:21-25).

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### 9:51-56

It is good to try to understand as much as possible of the context of the Biblical situation, and we think today of the antipathy the Jews and Samaritans had for each other. John 4:19-25 represents a typical conversation between the two sides. "The feud between the Jews and the Samaritans dates from the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah when the Samaritans were not allowed to join the Jews in building and consequently did their best to hinder the work (Ezra 4:1-5; Neh. 2:17-20). Soon a rival temple and priesthood were established on Mt. Gerizim and the breach became irreparable. At Jesus' time the feud was extremely bitter." (Luce quoted by Geldenhuys). In fact the division goes back to 2 Kings 17:24-41 where we learn that the Samaritans were descended from the people of pagan nations that the King of Assyria brought in to repopulate the northern kingdom of Israel after the ten tribes had been removed from the land under the judgment of God. In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, after the return from the captivity in Babylon, there was a natural and earnest desire on the part of the Jews to maintain the purity of their race even to the extent of the separation spoken of in Nehemiah 13:23ff. It is easy to see how traditions of antagonism harden so that reconciliation is impossible. But we need to remember also that the strictest of the Jews, the Pharisees, priding themselves on their purity of ancestry and worship, were no less antagonistic to the advent of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Religion, whatever its pedigree, when petrified becomes a terrible enemy to the truth and grace of God. Religion, whatever its name or claim, without God, without truth, without grace, without humanity, is a thing of the Devil.

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### 9:57-62

Here is a marvellous lesson in personal counselling. Remember that Jesus was on the road (57) that was to take Him to Jerusalem to be taken up (51), a phrase which refers vividly and expressively to His death on the Cross (cf John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34). To follow him meant to go with Him to share that cross. Each of these men was urged to count the cost before any commitment of life took place, and to consider the conflict of loyalties which discipleship inevitably brings. Three realms of life are represented in these men: security, duty, and affection, and a man must be prepared to sacrifice each and all of these *if necessary* in order to follow Christ. The claim of discipleship is so urgent and all embracing that all other loyalties must give way to it. It is comparatively easy to



give up evil things to follow Christ, especially if the evil has begun to make its destructive work felt in life and personality. The really difficult decisions are the choices between the good and the best. When we come to v.62 we have a word that confronts every plausible excuse given for the poverty of our commitment to Christ. Looking back usually signifies the longing of the heart for what has been given up, a dissatisfaction with what is now possessed, and a turning of the life away from the Saviour. Looking back so very often means the first step on the way out, and however we excuse our actions we know we are not deceiving the Crucified Saviour.

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### **9:57-62**

The first man was emotionally eager and impulsive of heart and such characteristics are all too infrequent in contemporary Christianity. But at the same time the man had a real degree of self-confidence in his capacity to be a suitable and acceptable candidate for service. He must have been shocked when Jesus told him he had no idea at all of what it would mean. No doubt Jesus' word about wandering foxes and birds having more of a worldly resting place than Himself made the man aware of the naked reality of the cost of discipleship. There is no easing of the demand, no time for personal gratification in the life that is given up to Christ for salvation and service. It is a lonely as well as a costly road and many cannot face the discipline of loneliness and so cling to the social necessities of life (as they regard them) that they never become fruitful. There is a detachment from this world that is absolutely fundamental to spiritual life and the Lord gives or withholds human blessing in the way best for us if we would be of use to Him. It is all too easy to get our roots down in a comfortable, pleasant plot, in a way that cancels out the pilgrim life. Faith that saves is much more rigorous than this. Read Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-22.

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### **9:57-62**

Jesus presented a radical discouragement to the first man, but gave an equally radical challenge to the other two who stipulated that their availability for Christ and His service must be conditioned and qualified by circumstances of home, family and business life. Once we consent to family ties being allowed unquestioned sovereignty over our lives there is little chance of Jesus being able to get us at all, since family will always have some pressing reason for asking priority. This can become blackmail and highlights Jesus' words in Matt. 10:32-39, cf. Luke 8:19-21. Close friends also can do Devil's work, coming between us and Christ (Matt. 16: 21-23; Acts 21:10-14). In following Christ it is fatal to look back for that, as in ploughing, leads only to a crooked and useless furrow which someone has to re-plough before any use can be made of it. But what of the apparent harshness of v.60? The Son of God did not set Himself over against the Law which commands that we honour father and mother. How could He? Could it be then that our chosen way of honouring parents by setting them before God is in fact dishonouring them? Campbell Morgan, quoting G. Adam Smith, says "the phrase in v.59 need not even imply that the father was old or ill but that the son was using the words to express devotion to his father and declaring that so long as the father needed him he would not follow Christ. Both these last men are typical of those who have always something to do before giving their loyalty to Christ.

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### **10:1-11**

Two things are paramount here: the urgency of the issue presented in the message and the danger involved in carrying it. Two other references highlight the costly road of discipleship: Matt. 11:12 and Acts 14:22. To speak of lambs among wolves is to emphasise that apart from supernatural oversight the disciples had no hope of safety or survival. They were not to look for success save in a limited sense and they would receive acceptance only from those who were chosen of the Father (John 6:37, 44-45; 15:16-21; 17:6, 9, 11-15). Thirty five pairs of disciples were sent to prepare in every city Jesus intended visiting. There is an urgency of crisis running through every verse. Jesus' men were to make haste, to subdue personal considerations, to present a radical issue that brooked no trifling, and to urge upon men that the Kingdom was near. In fact the King Himself was coming and passing through their communities to claim His throne on the Cross and in a very real sense people had only a brief passing moment in which to decide spiritual issues. Some people, when so challenged by the messengers of the Gospel, say that if only Christ Himself came they would know the truth for sure and would have no



hesitation in yielding to Him. This is false as Jesus insists later in v.16 and in Luke 16:27-31. Since this is so, every occasion of preaching is filled with crisis. This is why we must pray more before and after the preaching.

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### **10:1-11**

Jesus took full responsibility for the whole venture of evangelism (3) making no excuse for its costliness but at the same time deploring the fact that there were so few labourers for such a mighty potential harvest. Prayer is the appointed method for recruiting ministers and missionaries and all who are needed to serve (John 4:31-42; Matt. 9:35-38). God is to be asked to send out, a strong word of compulsion, His own men to do the work (Jer. 20:9; Amos 7:13-15), for they alone can do it. Remember that a ripe harvest left too long for lack of reapers becomes a harvest depleted and wasted. The men so sent by God must remember that they are no longer private individuals but ambassadors of the King, under authority and charged to go with haste and reality. Nothing must be allowed to impede the progress of their task. God will provide (4) and they must not waste time in long-winded talk or salutation (4). If a spirit of peace meets the offer of peace all is well (6). The messengers are not intruders nor beggars (7), and they must be prepared to allow people to minister to them in order that they might be free to minister the Gospel. Ceremonial scruples, so important to the Jews, were not to be allowed to impede their progress (8). Both practical action and verbal proclamation are to be engaged in (9) and all the while a work of division and judgment will be going on, which work also we must testify to (10-11). Such is the crisis that there must be no confusion and people must be made aware of the parting of the ways. This is one reason why the Lord's disciples must keep themselves pure, clean vessels, to carry an untainted message.

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### **10:12-16**

The privilege of having spiritual ministry brings responsibility, and Jesus compares various cities. It is one thing to consider the judgment of Sodom where the city had only one wretched, compromised backslider to bear witness to eternal and gracious truth. But the judgment of cities that have been visited with the light, grace and truth of Christ and have rejected it as of no value is greater, because they have no excuse for their sin. The three Israelite cities named had known more of the blessed work of Christ than most, but it had produced no response of faith and obedience. On the other hand, says Jesus, if wicked, worldly, pagan places like Tyre and Sidon had heard the preaching and seen the fruit of life-changing power such as the Jews had seen, there would have been a wave of repentance and faith which could only have been described as revival. It is one thing to stand against God in the darkness of ignorance or of false teaching, but to continue to stand against God in the full blaze of the truth is a terrible condemnation. But this is what happens in a true biblical ministry. The hostility of some increases with what could well be called demonic intensity. There may not be histrionic reaction but the cold, calculated refusal of Christ cannot be concealed. The advent of Christ is life and death, salvation and judgment (2 Cor. 2:14-17; 4:1-7; Deut. 30:15-20). Jesus' words in v.15 are really "Oh, Capernaum, even you, where I have stayed, and worked, my own city (Matt. 9:1) of whom I have had such hopes, even you have turned away." How sad! (John 6:66-71; Heb. 10:38-39.)

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### **10:17-20**

In their evangelistic mission the seventy found success far greater than they had ever expected and they had seen the personal powers of evil cast out from human lives with (apparently) an ease that was quite astonishing. The joy of the disciples in their success had elated them, and in measure they were in danger. Jesus corrected their excess enthusiasm by signifying that the victory over the powers of evil was not to be wondered at and not to be allowed to become a fixation, in terms of its practical operation in acts of exorcism. Granted these were real and amazing victories, but not more marvellous or noteworthy than the age long, continuing victory of God and His purposes in the face of every malicious attack of the Devil right from the Garden of Eden to the Cross and to the end of time. Think of how Satan was foiled right through the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (though not without costly blunders on their part). Think of the preservation of the chosen seed of Israel until the fulness of the time and the coming of the Saviour. Think of the preservation of the Saviour until the given moment of His death (John 8:20). On the face of it these are not glorious victories, for they are comparatively silent, yet

they are far-reaching in power and consequence. So is the quiet re-birth of a soul by the Holy Spirit. A work has been done by God which can never be reversed. So it is with the writing of our names in heaven.

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### 10:17-20

In the interest of effective service we must be sure of two things: the defeat of Satan and the danger of pride. If our grasp of the first is unbalanced and over-subjective, we shall certainly fall into the trap of the second and be so taken up with the thrill and excitement of victory that we forget the One who gives it. This will lead to the cessation of the powerful victory for we will be taking the glory to ourselves. The reference to the fall of Satan is not meant to make us speculate as to exactly when this event took place whether before, during or prophetically speaking, at the end of history. Satan has been defeated, a fact which cannot be denied. Think back to the Temptation (4:1-14) and see the same victory in 9:42-43. Now this victory is given to Christ's servants. Where they go in Christ's name as His messengers they will prove that Satan has to withdraw his forces and concede defeat. But if they try to act in unbelief, in their own strength, they will be confounded (Acts 19:13-17). We must face each new situation not in the hope that the Devil will be overcome but in the faith that he has already been dealt with and that it is only because of the fiendish cleverness of his lies that we ever doubt the facts (Rev. 12:7-13). The adversary is the accuser (Job 1:9; Zech. 3:1) and he is a continuing liar (John 8:44; 1 Kings 22:19-23) who goes about roaring in order to panic the frightened (1 Pet. 5:8). He is always contrary to God, but always defeated (1 John 3:8; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14. This is the message of the Cross (John 12:31) and it is by virtue of the work of the Cross that our names are written in God's book of life and our lives are drawn into His glorious purposes of redemption. That God should deal thus with sinners such as we are should be the heart of our wonder, worship and rejoicing.

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### 10:21-24

Jesus' exultant conversation with the Father is clearly linked closely with the experience of the disciples. In every possible way they were safe (v.19). This safety is due to the fact that the whole eternal Trinity is active on behalf of those who stand and work in Christ's name, granting them safety, sight and service. Our Lord's rejoicing here seems to be in the perfection of God's ordering of the things of the Kingdom, entrusting them to frail mortals, likened to babes, so that the glory of the whole scheme can never belong to anyone but the Father (Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 1:17-31; 15: 20-28). As the Son contemplates the glory of the Father's will He rejoices (a very intense word ) in the Holy Spirit, and we see the harmony of the Trinity. See this also in John 10:30; 16:7-16, 27-28; 17:3, 19-26; Heb. 9:14 . The Son reveals the Father, but it is so ordained that those who are wise in their own conceits are blinded to the truth, whereas those who in childlike simplicity receive the truth begin to see. When Jesus refers to things hidden from the wise and learned, he is not denigrating all we mean by education and exalting the "unlearned". Some of the latter can be very opinionated while the former can be humble, being aware of how much more there is to learn. God reveals Himself to whomsoever He will. There is this note of sovereignty which is inescapable as well as inexplicable and our Lord Jesus accepted it with rejoicing simplicity.

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### 10:21-24

Verse 22 is a glorious statement of the divinity of Christ, a declaration of the unity of the Father and the Son, and a categorical affirmation that no man can come to the Father except through the Son. This is the theme of the whole of John's Gospel and highlights the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the Christian message. All who are of God will come to Christ (John 5:20-27; 6:37-47; 10:22-30) and all who refuse to come to Christ are not of God. There is no other name given whereby men can be saved (Acts 4:12) and this is where all our witnessing and preaching must centre. Having spoken to the Father (21), and to the crowd (22), adding the invitation recorded in Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus turned finally to His own disciples and reminded them of their tremendous privilege in being made partakers and preachers of such gospel truth. We all need to be reminded of this in days when sound biblical ministry is so scarce. Some would give a great deal to have even a week or two of that kind of ministry and fellowship which we take so much for granted. It might do us all good to be

kept from church for a few weeks or months, deprived of fellowship, tapes of services or even the capacity to read our Bibles with or without notes. It would make us appreciative and much more concerned about others (Neh. 8:1-12). These men (and ourselves after them) were living in days of fulfilment (1 Pet. 1:10-12; Heb. 11:13, 39-40) such as had not been granted before. But privilege brings responsibility.

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### **10:25-29**

The story of the lawyer, recorded also in Matt. 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34 introduces us to two stories recorded only by Luke: the Good Samaritan and Martha and Mary. Matthew indicates the occasion of the lawyer's question to be a time of rigorous questioning of Jesus, with the aim of beating Him down, while Mark indicates that the man's question had a real degree of sincerity about it. "To the lawyer, eternal life is a prize to be won by meticulous observance of religious rules: to Jesus love to God and neighbour is in itself the life of the heavenly kingdom, already begun on earth. The lawyer wants moral duties limited and defined with rabbinic thoroughness: Jesus declines to set any limits to the obligations of love. Religion to the one is a set of restrictive regulations, to the other a boundless series of opportunities." (Caird) The lawyer and the listening Pharisees were well versed in the Scriptures and were no doubt listening intently to hear if Jesus' answer was "sound". But the tables were turned and the man was made to admit that he knew the answer to his own question, and so had to sit in judgment on himself. That he tried to escape made the following story essential.

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### **10:25-29**

Religion without morality is a mockery, and love to God which does not issue in love to others is fraudulent. This lawyer had grasped the two-fold message of the Law, combining Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18. Now, love to God is an inward, private matter, which if a man claims to feel cannot really be challenged or contradicted. But the moment you introduce the matter of love to your neighbour you are dealing with the outward manifestation of inward grace, and this can be examined and challenged. Consider James 2:8-18; 1 John 3:10-11, 14-18; 4:7-8, 11, 19-21. The lawyer's answer was orthodox, and if eternal life is to be won by keeping the Law, then Jesus' challenge in v.28 was absolutely on target. It certainly shook the man, for he went on to seek a loophole of escape (29), knowing full well that he had not begun to meet his own stated position of love (27). If this is how to inherit eternal life then all of us are doomed to failure! Note that Jesus did not present the man with the Gospel of salvation by grace alone. He was not ready to hear such news which would mean little to him. He had first to learn consciously his failure, his need and his hopelessness. That is why Jesus said he was to go and put into practice his own code of salvation. It would break his heart, and the moment he was willing to confess he could not inherit or earn life by his own efforts he would be ready for the good news.

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### **10:30-37**

This man found himself cornered by Jesus' searching words and sought for a qualification of the term "neighbour" that would excuse his failures. But the spirit which seeks some limitation of neighbourly responsibility is in itself a denial of the law of love. Jesus spoke about a Samaritan, a race despised by the "pure-blooded" Jews, who showed himself a neighbour to a Jew whom his fellow Jews had declined to help. The traveller being left half-dead, both the priest and Levite were in a quandary. If he was dead and they touched him they would be ceremonially unclean (Num. 19:11ff) and this meant far more to them than the need of a suffering man. No doubt the priest and Levite had a concern for "humanity". But it is easy to have a burden for "humanity", especially on the other side of the world, and at the same time to be ruthlessly indifferent to the man or woman next door. Theoretical loving has no value. The despised Samaritan did not stop at compassionate feelings but became involved, took care of the half-dead man, disrupted his own travelling plans, and arranged to come again to see how the victim was progressing. Note that the two coins represented two days' wages! This indeed is love in action. But when the lawyer was challenged in v.36-37 he declined to take on his lips the name "Samaritan". This was bigotry and spiritual pride, the marks of empty religion. But Jesus pressed home the point that the despised "outsider" was the example of a life that pleased God, and the lawyer was left with his own thoughts about eternal life.

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### **10:38-42**

The two stories of the Samaritan and Martha and Mary have been placed together by Luke for a purpose. The first story teaches us that what pleases God is a life of works of grace and love, although there is no suggestion that this can "earn" salvation. The second story emphasises that the life pleasing to God is one of worship and devotion, which here is placed over against the frantic busy-ness that is typical of over anxious, tense people who, in their activity of earnest labour, are apt to forget that people are people and not just "objects" to be served. Remember that from 9:51 onwards the Cross shadows all these stories and, in calling at the house in Bethany, Jesus was no doubt seeking fellowship with His friends by way of strengthening and refreshing. Now Martha, with sincerity, energy, and ingenuity was not only glad to welcome the Master but was determined to give Him the best meal that could be provided. She was "saved to serve" and would honour her Lord. But is it hospitality to set down the Guest and then abandon Him for the kitchen? Martha was full of good works and she is not to be faulted merely on that account. But it is Jesus who puts the question mark against her driving preoccupation with work because it had made her sulky and critical towards her sister and also towards Jesus. In spite of all her work Martha was more aware of herself than of others and in the end obtruded that "self" on the scene with a demand for recognition. We all need to ask why we choose to do what we do.

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### **10:38-42**

Compare the two sisters as they are portrayed in John 11:17-45 where Martha, the elder, seems the more positive and resolute in her discipleship and attitude to Jesus. But here Luke draws attention to what appears to be jealousy between the sisters over the attention Jesus appeared to pay to one more than the other. This was Devil's work, destroying a sweetness of relationship and endangering that particular character of grace and peace in the home at Bethany which meant so much to our Lord as His death drew near. Note that Jesus did not say that one sister's attitude was better than the other's. Nor does the story suggest that the contemplative life of quiet worship is to be desired above all other activity. What it does say is that Martha's busy, restless activity, clearly excessive, was depriving our Lord of what He most desired (fellowship with her), and depriving Martha of what she most needed, hence her dissatisfaction with Mary and Jesus. It is never right that we should be so busy serving that we have no time to learn. First things first. Our effectiveness in service to Christ is not measured by activity. He wants us, and often cannot get us, simply because we are too busy.

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### **10:38-42**

Consider the sisters in John 11:1-5; 12:1-3. There is no devaluation of Martha in Luke's story although there is rebuke, given gently, and given publicly only because Martha caused it to be so. There is no doubt that Martha was motivated by a love for her Lord but her bustling service became a misery to herself and a tyranny to others. The word "distracted" in v.40 signifies that Martha's attempt to listen and bustle with work at the same time had failed. "Some people seem to imagine all Mary did was to sit herself down, to have a good time. If she had done that, Christ would never have commended her. Mary knew the one deep secret that love cannot finally express itself in service. It must take the place of devotion, of discipleship." (Morgan) "The most important part of our religion is the spiritual exercise of communion with our Redeemer. When things are right in this respect, we shall also in our practical life be actively busy in His honour. It is certainly one of the most difficult lessons to learn, to maintain the right balance between the life of quiet worship in spirit and in truth and the practising of our religion in active service." (Geldenhuys) Martha was not wrong in dedicating herself to practical service, but in how she did it.

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### **11:1**

The section of Luke's Gospel from 9:51 to 11:13 is said to contain six clear lessons concerning discipleship with a progression in importance to this last one on prayer. They are 9:51ff., Discipleship; 10:1ff., Active Service; 10:21-24, Knowledge of God; 10:25ff., Religion and life; 10:38ff., Fellowship not self; 11:1-13, Prayer. Today's



verse introduces the Lord's Prayer which in Matt. 6:9-13 is given in different words as part of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew the initiative is with Jesus and the "pattern" prayer is given as a corrective to praying with a vain repetition of words, and this alone accounts for the differences in the two forms of the prayer. Prayer must never degenerate into rigid word forms. Luke tells us that the disciples asked to be taught to pray. At last they seemed to see the positive relation between prayer and the power of God. This represents tremendous spiritual advance and a recognition that it is God alone who can work. But, as we shall see, the opening spirit of worship in the prayer in its preoccupation with God reminds us that God is not to be used as a glorified power-point to enable us to achieve our ends. His ends, His will, His glory are what matter. Then, and then only, does the prayer turn to its manward aspect. We wonder which disciple spoke the words of request. He must have been aware of his own inability and limitation. This is a mark of grace.

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### 11:2-4

The modern versions read simply, "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come." We cannot here enter into a detailed comparison of the Lord's Prayer as given in the words of Matt. 6:9ff, and this version Luke gives. The article in the New Bible Dictionary (I.V.F.) is very comprehensive for those who wish such a study. The words Jesus spoke on this occasion would be familiar from the earlier Sermon on the Mount where the general pattern of prayer was taught. Here the prayer is very personal and the word for Father is "Abba", the word with which a little child addresses his father. This makes God very near, immediately concerned with a child's imperfect speech, and ready to hear. This does not cancel out the fact that God is in all the heavens, full of might, majesty and power, but it does mean that our awe of Him does not deter us from coming freely, openly and trustingly to Him. But it is still on the basis of the fact that there is no place where He is not present in power and might that we come and speak His name. The name of God is the expression of all He is in His being, and this petition desires that the Name be sanctified and expressed in and through us who are God's sons and daughters (Ezek. 36:23; Eph. 2:4-7; 3:10). This is the desire of all true children that the Father should be held in loving reverence for what He is in Himself and what He has done. This is indeed worship, an all too often absent element in our prayers which can become too easily a "shopping list" of requests, or even demands so centred on ourselves that God is forgotten save as the "provider". We need the Psalms to teach us (Ps. 8; 103; 107:1-8, 15, 21, 31). Let us worship and bow down (Ps. 95:1-7a).

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### 11:2-4

In Luke's version the petition, "Your kingdom come," stands by itself without the addition of "Your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth," but of course the prayer concerning the Name, the kingdom and the will is one prayer expressed in a threefold way. Think of the parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13; then read Luke 17:20-21 which states that the kingdom does not come with outward show but is in fact in the midst now. Then go to Acts 1:6-7 and see that this petition is not an obvious one but one full of mystery though without uncertainty. The prayer could well read, "Your divine rule, let it come," which of course it has, in the coming of the King Himself. It is coming in irresistible advance which neither men nor devils can stop Acts 5:34-39; Matt. 16:18; 2 Cor. 13:8. And it will come in the full outshining of glory when Christ comes again. Many a time it seems that God is doing nothing, but to believe this is to capitulate to unbelief. It would be to consider the Cross a disaster beyond measure instead of a glorious victory. We must learn that even "the slow watches of the night" belong to God and are effective in His ordering of His kingdom, just as much as the glorious days when it seems all His armies hold the field and all His enemies flee in disorder. Read 2 Chron.20:5-7, 12-13, 15-19. Never lapse into thinking that we are part of the broken-down remnant of a forgotten army. We are part of the Church militant and victory is never for a moment in doubt. Pray that the Father's divine sovereignty will more and more find its rightful place in human hearts and lives, beginning with ourselves. Lord, go on doing what You are already doing, and do it whether or not we understand it or recognise it at the time.

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## 11:2-4

Our three-fold need is for food, forgiveness and safety. The bread we must ask for is all that we need for daily life, and we ask for it to be given in a way that will enable us to fulfil the earlier petitions that we might hallow God's name, do His will and share in his kingdom. On the spiritual as well as the physical level plain fare, well balanced, in sufficient amount and properly prepared is far more wholesome than a diet of sweet delicacies. Read Prov. 30:8-9 and consider well the reason underlying much of our discontent and jealousy. With most of us there is considerable realism of attitude and desire concerning material sustenance and worldly companionship, but we need to be equally realistic with regard to the milk and meat of the word of God and the need to meet with the saints for mutual encouragement and counsel (1 Pet. 2:1-3; Heb. 3:12-14; John 3:31-34; 6:24-35, 48-58). When we pray for bread day by day we are not only emphasising our continuing need and our reliance on God moment by moment, we are also reminding ourselves that yesterday's bread or manna is no use for today (Ex. 16:1-30). In like manner we remind ourselves of that dangerous spirit of complaint which craves for the food of the world and scorns the provision of God (Num. 11:4-6). How much we need to cultivate the grace of contentment, because we know our times are in God's hands, not the hands of men or devils (Ps. 31:15-24; Phil. 4:9-19). This is the spirit of the prayer for daily bread, a prayer spoken to a Father who knows what we need better than we do.

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## 11:2-4

The need for forgiveness is ever with us and we need not try to deny it (1 John 1:7-2:2). But we cannot ask for forgiveness for ourselves on the ground of the free grace of God and at the same time deny forgiveness to those who may have sinned against us. That would be to play the hypocrite and arouse the anger and rebuke of the Lord (Matt. 5:23-26; 18: 21-35). So important is this lesson that Jesus states it in very blunt terms in Matt. 6:14-15. An unforgiving spirit is a poisonous thing which robs us of the joy of being in the Father's arms. Think of how childish this spirit is and how much it is motivated by jealousy and selfishness. Think of two children in a parent's arms and one of them sulks and cries and won't play because the other child is there. One wants to have the Father all to himself, but it cannot be. As he grows up he will learn that the Father's arms, His love, care and pleasure, have room enough and to spare for each and all of His children. Love and special care and attention to one when needed do not ever mean that the other is displaced or devalued. Indeed, less petting from a father signifies that he considers the child to be growing up. Would we rather be treated as children or adults? (1 Cor. 3:1-3; 14:20).

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## 11:2-4

The final petition of Luke's version of the ideal or pattern prayer is simply, "Lead us not into temptation," while Matthew adds, "but, deliver us from evil," or "from the evil," or "from the evil one". This latter rendering suggests that there is a deeper evil to be delivered from than the temptation to sin, and in order that we might be so delivered out of the influence of Satan himself we may at times need to be led into deep waters and dark places. But this is in the hand of God who orders our way, and Luke's prayer is that we might, be kept in safety. There must be no arrogant bravado on the part of a Christian, no rushing into situations where every sign cries aloud for caution. We must learn to know ourselves well enough to keep away from those situations, conditions and stimuli, by which temptation is born. God does not entice a person to evil (Jas. 1:12-16) and indeed promises that we will not be put to the test to an extent beyond our capacity to bear or to remove ourselves from it (1 Cor. 10:12-15). *If need be* God allows us to be put to the test (Jas. 1: 2-4; 1 Pet. 1:3-7) in ways He Himself orders and supervises. But we, having learned our weakness and being aware of our proneness to sin, must always pray that we will not be brought into situations where we will be exposed to the fierceness of temptation. This is the prayer that will cause us to decline many invitations and at times will cause us to turn back half-way there. "Sometimes we have temptation but no opportunity, and, sometimes opportunity but no temptation. But God help the man who finds himself with temptation and opportunity at the same time." So said a Salvation Army Officer very wisely.

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### 11:5-10

This parable which contrasts God with the sleepy friend is an encouragement to pray. The relationship between the men, the bonds of friendship and the capacity of the man to provide what was needed and asked for, are all implicit in the story. It was the unblushing, unashamed persistence of the asker that brought the answer. Now, if even a human friend can rise to that kind of giving, how much more will God respond *without* being badgered, even though at times He seems to delay (cf. 18: 1-8). Note that the man is not asking luxuries for himself but necessities for others. But do not forget the established relationship of friendship between the asker and the giver. This was germane to their lives, and their association was not operative only when something was wanted. This may well be the basic defect of our prayer lives. We are slow to pray unless a situation confronts us that brings us to the point of desperation. This is one of the reasons why we have come to think of God as being reluctant, a God from whom blessing has to be wrested. The point of v.9 seems to be the immediacy of the response to realistic asking. If we say we have been knocking, asking and seeking for a long time and there is no answer, is it not time we stopped to consider the situation? That God has heard is not in doubt, because He is not asleep. That He has the power to act is not in doubt. Does it not mean that the answer is in the negative? The next verses elaborate the answer.

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### 11:11-13

The parent who gives a child what ever he asks, simply because he wants it, is neither good nor wise. That there are foolish parents is undeniable, and they work on a very limited view of life, solving each situation in the easiest possible way with no thought of the long-term consequences. But here, in the matter of prayer, Jesus is insisting that even an earthly father, full of faults, will not answer his child's petition with something useless (stones instead of bread) or something dangerous (a serpent for fish or a scorpion for an egg). How much more is it true that God will not deal with us in such a perverse, unfeeling, careless and cruel way. The reference to the giving of the Holy Spirit must be understood here in relation to the subject matter in hand, which is prayer, and not in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, sanctification or enablement for service. If we have Christ then we have the Holy Spirit, and if we have not we are not children of the Father, and all the matter of prayer, based on filial relationship, is a closed experience to us. Think of all Jesus' promises concerning the giving of the Spirit and the gracious ministry that Spirit would exercise in bringing us into ever closer relationship with our Saviour (John 14:15-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15). Now think of Romans 8:26-28 and Acts 15: 25-28 and see how godly men, trusting in the promised guidance of the Spirit have considered and reasoned together to be assured of the will of God. This is the attitude of confidence that underlies all our praying. We believe God has a will for us and that He will make it known when we desire it with our whole heart. We need never be on our own. What ineffable comfort.

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### 11:14-26

Having completed a long section of his story dealing with teaching on discipleship, Luke now begins to show the conflict or warfare involving Jesus, and how that conflict increased in intensity until it culminated in the Cross. Every advancing work of God will know this conflict, and our Lord focuses attention here on the existence of two kingdoms locked in combat. Such is the hatred of the kingdom of evil for Christ that we find unbelieving religious men here accusing Jesus of being a minister of Satan. That a miracle had been done could not be denied and therefore it had to be explained away somehow. If men said such things about Christ, we must not be surprised if they assess our work in scurrilous terms in order to demolish its standing (they cannot demolish the work). Others in the passage were not so blatantly evil and asked for a sign, although they had just witnessed one. But this request for a show of power to compel conviction was just a repeat of the third temptation in the wilderness (4:9-13). Now when the Devil is so slanderously active there comes a time when silence would be wrong and Jesus spoke out to refute the accusations. It seems that other Jews at this time were exercising a ministry of exorcism of evil spirits and the opinion of the Pharisees was that this was being done by the power of God. Of course, we do not give much credence to the spiritual assessments of men so manifestly unspiritual in their attitude as these men were. The Jews approved of some people, because of association, relationship and pedigree and *therefore* approved their actions. They disapproved of Jesus and *therefore*

branded Him as being in league with Satan. This is the devilish technique of double standards and it needs to be exposed.

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### 11:14-26

If we are to engage in battle with the powers of evil we must learn to understand Satan and his kingdom. Jesus makes plain here that there is such a kingdom of evil, and that it is organised (Eph. 6:12ff.) and united, not divided. The picture Jesus gives in v.17 is of a kingdom divided and the various houses or sections falling upon each other to mutual demolition. But He insists that Satan's kingdom is not so divided when it comes to the matter of opposition to Christ and to God. Think of how Herod and Pilate, long-standing enemies, were reconciled in the process of delivering Christ to death. Think of the Pharisees and Sadducees, so basically divided doctrinally, yet made one in hatred of the Son of God. Read in Rev. 17:12-18 of the various powers of an evil world sinking their bitter differences to make common cause against the Saviour. Yet at the same time we believe the kingdom of evil, by its very nature and in spite of the malign and powerful rule of its head, is a restless, incoherent, essentially divided kingdom which contains the dynamic of its own destruction. Think of Satan going to and fro in Job 1:7 and of the words of Isaiah 57:20. Think most of all of the Devil's most magnificent achievement in the foul murder of the Son of God. He had engineered his own final destruction, and pathetic Judas, duped by the seeming attractiveness of Satan, was one of the first of Satan's minions to realise the truth. A similar devilish ruthlessness is seen in the world of business and entertainment in the way people are taken up, manipulated and cast aside. No one working for the kingdom of evil has any guarantee of continuance. Their future is without hope.

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### 11:14-26

An interesting reference to the powers of evil being able to work signs very similar to, indeed identical to the mighty works of the Spirit of God, is in Exodus 7:8-12, 22; 8:7, 18. In Exodus 8:19 there is mention of the finger of God, an Old Testament reference which would not be lost on the Pharisees."Jesus draws a picture of Satan as lord of a fortified mansion, keeping his ill-gotten possessions intact until he is over-powered by one who is stronger than he. Thus we are bidden to think of the world as enemy-occupied territory: it belongs by right to God, but through the sin of man it has fallen under the tyranny of Satan, who keeps it in a grip that no power of man can break; and the good news of the gospel is that into this embattled fortress has broken the first champion and representative of an invading and liberating power, the kingdom of God. The two kingdoms confront one another in a war that knows neither truce nor neutrality: he who does not side with Jesus sides with Satan, and he who does not fight for the forces of unity fights for the forces of disruption." (Caird) No-one can be an onlooker in this elemental battle. We are involved and apart from this mighty salvation which Jesus alone can bring we remain in our dark bondage. (Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 1: 12-14; 2 Cor. 4:4).

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### 11:14-26

It is the note of attempted neutrality that seems to introduce the illustration of v. 24-26. There is the suggestion here of a man who had been brought under the influence of Christ, being blessed by the gracious spirit of the work of the kingdom. It is the kind of thing many may feel in a congregation visited by the word of God in its blessing and refreshing and enlivening power. This man had been influenced, but that is not the same as being saved from sin and Satan. He had been constrained to reform his life, seemingly to such a degree that the evil spirit got somewhat disgusted with his lodgings and leaves. But reformation is not the same as regeneration and the man remained essentially the same at heart though changed on the surface. This man had not been delivered from bondage by the entrance of the mighty Saviour. The heart was empty, cleaned of the atmosphere and debris of the squatter evil spirit who now roamed the waterless wastes of homelessness. The man's attempted neutrality, which was really a refusal to allow Christ to enter as Master and Lord, was the very thing that tempted the evil spirit to return. Seeing the cleaned-up lodging of the man's heart, and demons always having pretensions to grandeur, the evil spirit went and gathered his colleagues, who this time came with the intention of staying. An empty heart is dangerous: it will not stay empty.

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### **11:27-28**

Everything about this woman's enthusiastic shout marked it out as being motivated by a wrong spirit. A solemn sermon such as they had just heard was not the time for pious outcry. The fact that it was a woman who was shouting so publicly would have had the effect of branding her in Jewish society as an evil woman and would have brought a slur on the followers of Jesus. The Jews would have said, "That's the kind of people He gets around Him. We were right in doubting His credentials." Thirdly, the woman's interjection would have had the effect in a split second of turning the attention of the people away from Jesus to herself. No doubt she thought she was inspired by the Spirit, but which spirit seems obvious. Even her references to the sweet intimacies of motherhood seem bawdy as she bellows her words aloud (v.27AV). Jesus' answer is very pointed. Pious effusions can be nothing but sentimental indulgence and are no substitute for spiritual and moral obedience. It is interesting here that we have a very early attempt to focus attention on the blessedness of the mother of our Lord rather than on the Lord Himself. The swiftness with which Jesus dealt with the incident, and the grace of His firmness, are a wonderful testimony to His aliveness to God and to the enemy.

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### **11:29-32**

The section of Luke's story from 9:51-11:13 deals with the theme of discipleship and culminates in a lesson on prayer. This in turn leads to the section 11:14-54 which deals with the conflict between Jesus and His opponents. We have dealt fully with the subject of "Kingdom against Kingdom", emphasising both the subtlety and the persistence of evil, and we have seen the wrongness of spiritual indulgence, emotionalism and escapism in the two verses dealing with the woman (27-28). Now we move into a section dealing with unbelief as seen in the Pharisees and Scribes. There is an unbelief which is related to ignorance, and found among those who have never heard the truth of God, although Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15 speak of the light that lightens every man in the world. But there is also an unbelief for which there is no excuse whatever, because it is found in the context of knowledge. In v.29 Jesus answered the question posed in v.16 and He addressed those who had the incarnate Son of God among them, had heard the Word and seen the miracles, had argued the point and had been answered, but who still did not believe. This is religious unbelief and has the inevitable issue of judgment (John 9:39-41; 15:22-25). It is also a device of the Devil to overcome gullible witnesses, for hours of precious time can be wasted arguing with people who have not the slightest intention of coming near the truth and who argue simply to evade the issue of submitting to Christ. There is a right and a wrong time to speak, as there is a right and wrong method of speaking. This is the lesson for tomorrow.

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### **11:29-32**

People set in unbelief are always clamouring for some miraculous sign to overwhelm them convincingly and so allow them to escape the moral responsibility of believing. Jesus said a sign would be given and, if we take Matt. 12:38ff. in conjunction with Luke's version of the incident, we see that the sign was not merely the preaching of Jonah but that preaching coming from a man delivered miraculously from the dead. Of course we do not minimise Jonah's preaching of repentance in relation to the imminent judgment of God (Jonah 1:2; 3:1-10). That would be foolish, for faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God (Rom. 10:13-21) although many of those who hear it most clearly and consistently still refuse to believe. Not even a miraculous return from the dead will persuade such to believe. This is made clear in Jesus' words in Luke 16:27-31 and confirmed by the fact of Christ's resurrection, for even then these Jews would not believe. Granted many did believe unto salvation, but those who refused became even more diabolical in their refusal of the Gospel and the persecution of those who did believe. The wicked city of Nineveh believed because it recognised the authentic word of God. The Queen of Sheba, another rank outsider, believed because she heard, investigated and submitted to the astonishing confirmations of the message which had filtered through to her (1 Kings 10:1-9). These converted heathen will testify against unbelieving religious people who have enjoyed the privilege of the full shining of the light of God. This is the danger of belonging to a church where the truth is preached livingly. There is no excuse for unbelief, nor should there be any desire to make excuses. Christ's powerful word speaks for itself.



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### 11:33-36

These are difficult verses dealing with spiritual clear-sightedness and dullness. "Israel had been called to be God's light to illumine the world; but, instead of allowing her lamp to shine, she had covered it up to keep it from being blown out, and now had come to the point where she forgot what God's light looked-like. Her condition was like that of a man who is unaware that his eyesight is impaired, and who walks blithely into disaster under the impression that he can see where he is going." (Caird) But the message is more specific, for Jesus is dealing here with darkness of spirit when all around full light is shining. This figure of light has been used already by Jesus in Luke 8:16 and Matt. 5:15, where the application is to the disciples' responsibility to spread the light. Here Jesus is emphasising that, though He refuses a sign, He does not hide the light, but causes it to shine to the full. He *is* the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). But what use is light when there is no effective lamp or instrument by which the light can be "caught", focused, harnessed, spread and made use of? Wide open eyes in total darkness and blind eyes in brilliant light are equally futile. The eye is the organ by which light is caught for the service of the body, but if that eye is broken, clouded or evil, then the light is distorted, wasted, or denied. Think of a primitive lamp and how a broken wick or a sooty glass cancels out the benefit of the light. The evil eye Jesus speaks of here must be related to an evil disposition of life, and the message is that all the light of God that such a man looks at will be distorted. This seems to be the meaning of the light being darkness (35). Our perception can become so dark and defective that we can no longer recognise the truth even when it is right before our eyes and plain to be seen.

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### 11:33-36

Ps. 36:9 is an important verse and helps to make this passage clear. Read also 1 John 1:5-7; John 8:12; and Exodus 10:21-23; 14:19-20 where the one phenomenon was light to some and darkness to others. It seems clear Jesus was referring to the inner disposition or attitude of people's hearts which, when single in desire to do God's will, is blessed with light that leads on into further truth. But if there is refusal of light, a keeping of the truth in our heads never allowing it to sift and sanctify our lives, then darkness asserts itself increasingly. We read in Rom. 1:18-21 of those who hold down the truth in the interest of unrighteousness becoming darkened.

Such persons are often able to say that their conscience is clear, even to the extent of rejoicing in evil (Rom. 1:32). But without the shining of the light of the truth of God in Jesus Christ in our hearts effectively by the Holy Spirit our consciences are hopeless guides. This is the frightening thing about backsliding. We are increasingly unaware of how far away we have drifted. This is the warning of Hebrews 3:12-13; 4:1-2. The condition in its peril is described in Heb. 2:1-4 where the emphasis is not so much on our allowing precious truth to slip out of our grasp, but on the precious truth of salvation, rightly spoken of in terms of light, gradually, imperceptibly slipping away from us and receding into the meaningless background noise of life. This state can produce a fatal insensitivity to any further impact of the truth: the blindness and darkness Jesus refers to in today's verses. But "when a man takes heed that his whole person - desires, intellect, feeling and will - is illuminated and controlled by Him (Jesus), he will be spiritually illuminated and able to see." (Geldenhuys) The danger of trifling with truth or with darkness is manifest.

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### 11:37- 41

From here to the end of the chapter we have a series of seven searching criticisms of Pharisaism. Keep in mind such verses as Matt. 23:13-14; Mk. 7:1-13; 12:38-40; Lk. 20:46-47 and the suggestion (certainly true in some cases), that the wealth of these men was not honestly nor even humanely come by. It is said that when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 some two million pounds of money was found in the Temple vaults! Where there is dishonest gain the giving of paltry sums to charity becomes an offence to God and to man. Such actions are done in conformity to a man-made code of behaviour, possibly religious, but certainly not Christian! What we have in these few verses is an exposure of the abiding pitfalls of religion: the maintaining of an outward and superficial conformity to standards of God's law as men see it, but with no corresponding heart reality. There is also an exposure of the besetting sin of preoccupation with incidentals to the neglect of major moral and



spiritual issues. This legalism in religion concentrates on what a man does, not on what he is, and inevitably concerns itself with those aspects of conduct, usually the most superficial, which can readily be prescribed, reduced to a code of regulations, and easily measured. It is inevitable that such people become pleased with themselves and very harshly critical of all others. This hypocrisy was challenged constantly by Jesus in public (Matt. 23:1-5a) and in private, as in this story. Note very carefully that Jesus' private life conformed to His public teaching. While there is no suggestion that the Pharisee was seeking to trap or compromise Jesus, he was still astonished when Jesus began the meal without formal ceremonial washing. This was done deliberately by Jesus in order to create the opportunity to challenge the emptiness of conventional religiosity. He was sure of what He was doing and why He was doing it. Are we sure, when we read, pray, worship and do what is expected?

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### **11:37-42**

The passage culminates in this startling verse, the first of six "woes", which challenges the Pharisees for their concentration on the trivial to the neglect of the essential. Our Lord had already rebuked the hypocrisy of the ceremonial washing of even the outside of the vessels used and His reference to the "inside"(39) may be a suggestion of sumptuous living paid for by unscrupulous profit-mongering. The R.S.V. reads, "inside you are full of extortion and wickedness" and points to the character and motive of these men. The meaning of v.41 is vague. The R.S.V. reads, "Give for alms those things which are within." If there is inner purity, grace and mercy, then outward conduct will be good and true and will involve the giving of the whole life, together with its possessions to God and to others for God's sake. This total yielding to the ownership of God highlights the defect of the scrupulous tithing of the Pharisees. The reference here is to the tithing of agricultural produce, but the Pharisees extended this to include the produce of the herb garden just to be on the safe side. (The herbs might even have been a substitute for the greater crops.) The emphasis is on the scrupulous exactness of these men in respect of the smaller things, compared to their almost total neglect of the matters of love, justice and righteousness in respect of people and God. Fanatical or even extravagant concentration on matters of secondary importance usually indicates an imbalance towards and neglect of matters of basic moral and spiritual issue. We do not suggest that tithing as a pattern for Christian giving is a secondary matter, but even tithing and more than tithing our possessions is not an acceptable substitute for giving the heart, life and obedience. Christ wants us, not what we can give.

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### **11:43**

Yesterday's last verse made plain that legalistic religion concentrates on not doing wrong rather than on actually doing right, and this is a very common snare. It is in fact a slander on God, since it makes Him out to be a tyrant God waiting in vengeance for His people to do something wrong so that He can smite them. This is not the God who gave up even His own Son for sinners! Today's verse goes on to challenge our motives in religion. There is the danger that Christian service may be engaged in for purely carnal motives rather than from a desire to glorify God. This becomes evident when man fills the picture to the almost total exclusion of God. To be praised and admired by others is one thing, but to be approved by God is something quite different, although the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Note of course that this greed for place and popularity is expressed in God's House as well as in the market place. It was once said of a Christian leader that "he would fain be up among the angels, but he does not know who the angels are". How devastating! When we are determined to be "up among the best people" we forget that the Son of God came "down" to be among the broken, sinful and needy and in consequence we may miss many "angels" (Heb. 13:2). Of course if we are motivated as these Pharisees were we will have nothing at all to give to the needy, because God is found with the humble in heart and is at variance with the proud (Isa. 57:15; 66:2; Ps. 34:18). This does not mean we are to neglect the wealthy and worldly, for many, like Zaccheus, are hungry of heart (Luke 19:1ff.; 5:27ff.). But, whatever the social station and spiritual need of people, if we go to them with an empty religion of pious formality and grandiose self-congratulation we will be useless. These Pharisees, concentrating on minor pieties rather than on major moral and spiritual obligations, became men full of self satisfaction, vanity and demand for recognition. They had their reward (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16 ), for what it is worth.

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### **11:44**

Having already denounced wrong motives and wrong values, Jesus now charged these men with wrong influence. Matt. 23:27-28 gives Jesus' words in a different form but seems to confine the message to personal wrongness, whereas Luke goes on to make clear that wrong people, however well the wrongness is concealed, exert a wrong influence on all they come in contact with. These Pharisees, so conscious of their holiness and so full of self-admiration, were admired by men who stood in awe of them (fearing their power rather than valuing their religion). But their piety was dry and mouldy, it had no life, and its effect was to separate people from God. This is a solemn charge. Read the strong words of 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Jude 12-13; Rev. 3:1. We must learn to guard our influence, and to guard against the influence of others, for many are dangerous (Phil. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Rom. 16:17-18). Jesus' illustration here, based on the ceremonial law, would be patently obvious to his hearers. "Contact with death made a man ceremonially unclean (Num. 19:16), and graves were frequently whitened to warn all comers of the risk of defilement. Jesus calls the Pharisees unmarked graves, because their reputation for holiness concealed from men the insidious quality of their influence." (Caird) Up to this point the people might have been held free of guilt because they did not realise how false their teachers were. But now, when false influence and latent corruption and anti-God example were exposed, the lesson was obvious. Little wonder the Pharisees plotted to kill this Jesus who was taking away their kingdom from them.

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### **11:45-46**

These men were the professional teachers of the Law, the scholars, the intellectuals, and their business was to tell people what ought to be done. The fact that one of them now drew public attention to the whole class of lawyers signifies that Jesus' words were stinging the conscience and causing men to disregard their normal professional caution. But this is always the work of the Word of God. It exposes evil and brings all out into the open. Here it exposes the falsity of that kind of spiritual teaching of God's truth which lays down the law with rigour but at the same time maintains an attitude of inhuman indifference to the burdens thus laid on ordinary people. It is one thing to spend our lives telling others what is right and where they are wrong, but what do we do ourselves and what do we do to help others to be what they should be? There are many "ivory towers" from which all manner of pronouncements are made concerning the will and the work of God, but if the ivory tower becomes a haven of escape from the painful and paradoxical application of spiritual truths, then the teachers are guilty of hypocrisy. The man who lives in a comfortable home, with sympathetic family, and with varied interests and creative capacity for enjoyment, should not easily condemn the man who escapes from an overcrowded single room, dominated by third-rate T.V. variety shows, into a pub where he may well find company and intelligent conversation on a variety of subjects. We can all be guilty of double standards and, while we apply the rule rigorously to the other person, we can usually produce convincing arguments as to why we ourselves should be excused. How different is Paul's exhortation in Phil. 4:9!

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### **11:47-51**

Note that there was no immediate protest from the lawyers in respect of the charges already levelled against them, and it was in the face of silence, which spoke of guilty consciences, that Jesus proceeded to strip from them every shred of religious camouflage. These were men who venerated the dead prophets and persecuted the living prophets. Now, the test of religion is not the piety or sentiment with which past prophets are adulated, but the attitude in which the living prophets and their message are received and obeyed. Plaques and memorials are still erected to ministers who have died and eloquent eulogies are paid to them by the people and congregations who broke their ministers' hearts, resisted their ministry of the gospel, and drove them to an early grave. To erect a memorial is no substitute for the obedience of faith. The veneration of tradition commonly goes along with the harsh resistance and intolerance that martyrs the prophets.

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### 11:47-51

We see here the bitter cynicism of those whose attitude is that all that is worth saying has already been said in the past and that anything new, or even the old stated in new terms, is to be resisted and refused. Think of all the young ministers who have been persecuted by the phrase, "But we have always done it this way here." Jesus said here to the Jewish leaders that this was a dangerous attitude. There are two reasons. Firstly, God will not allow human obtuseness to frustrate His purposes of grace, and secondly, God warns that there is such a thing as an accumulation of guilt, which can fall on certain generations. This was eminently true of the Jews listening to Jesus, for in A.D.70 Jerusalem was destroyed and both Temple and nation reduced to public shame. This is very solemn when we apply the principle to our own day in which the organised establishment of religion has persistently refused to give credence to ministries grounded in God's Word which have produced fruit in people's lives in significant measure. For nearly half a century the church has chosen to deal with a mutilated Bible, a pathetically human Jesus, and a "gospel" which is not a gospel since it has no word of salvation and the world to come. God has spoken in many ways but His word has not been received, and we cannot help wondering in view of the progressive debility of organised religion, plus the social and moral disintegration of society, if God is going to bring us to a day of reckoning.

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### 11:52-54

In any time of spiritual and moral declension the ministry of the church has a great load of responsibility to carry. Jesus' words here must have caused venomous reaction. "The function of the scribes was to unlock the scriptures, so that men could find in them the knowledge of God; and instead by their concentration on the secondary and peripheral, they have locked the book and thrown away the Key." (Caird) What a searching statement! It was not so much that these teachers dabbled in what was false but that they were willfully sidetracked into dealing with second-line truth rather than with primary spiritual categories. This is the danger in preaching of any kind. We can spend so long in rambling introduction, interesting but not edifying in the basic sense, that we weary people before we bring them to deal with the fundamental substance of the passage in hand. We can be verbally meticulous, clever in presentation, and even mightily impressive, not to say humorous, but if we do not break the bread of life with the compassion and care of the Master we are less than useless. Note how Jesus says that the reason for the scribes' failure to be teachers of the law was the fact that they themselves had not entered into its truth. No minister can lead his people further on than he himself has gone. In the mercy of God and for the purposes of God the fruit of a ministry may exceed the integrity of the minister, but the minister does not escape culpability. Little wonder these men set out to trap and destroy Jesus in the way they would try to deal with any other person who so charged them with failure. Recall passages such as Ezekiel 34:1-10.

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### 12:1-3

When you sense the bitterness of official opposition in the closing verses of the previous chapter, you can understand why Jesus needed now to speak a word of counsel and encouragement to His disciples as they were sent out to the work. It takes realism to face the fury of the "Sanhedrin" in every generation, and Jesus here began to speak of false and true security. Throughout the chapter the theme develops along the line of fear of man and fear of God together with the comparison of earthly and heavenly treasure. The first verse here, spoken plainly and in public and in the hearing of the Pharisees, is quite devastating. It is the kind of speech no one should make without being very sure of his own integrity. "The whole case against them (the Pharisees) can be summed up in one word - hypocrisy. Jesus nowhere said that all Pharisees were hypocrites, nor that all hypocrites were Pharisees; but he found more hypocrisy among them than in any other group, and regarded it as the natural product of their teaching. The hypocrite is one who, consciously or unconsciously, has sacrificed truth to appearance: he is more taken up with what people think of him than with the actual state of his soul; he is so busy living up to his reputation that he has no time to be himself; he must always be justifying himself to others, to himself or to God. He may succeed in deceiving himself and others but not God; and the day is coming when all pretence will be exposed. The opposite of hypocrisy is repentance, which means accepting the

truth about oneself, facing oneself as one really is." (Caird) That is enough to think about for one day. If the truth be told, being ourselves is liberty whereas acting a part is bondage, which makes life into a hell.

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### 12:1-3

The first warning Jesus gave to men going out into service was to beware of hypocrisy, because it is futile as well as being destructive. People go to all lengths to give an appearance of sanctity to the most diabolical of activities. But the truth will be known. This can be a disturbing thought or a comforting one depending on your standpoint. What have you to hide? What is afraid of the full light of day? Secrecy is a wearing business especially when you realise how many of the stories in the daily papers were never meant to be known. To live your life in constant peril of being found out is exhausting, to say the least of it. How much more desirable is the fellowship of walking in the light (1 John 1:3-10). Secrecy provides no safety, only integrity can do that, and therefore a withdrawal into the attitude of, "I just won't say anything; I'll keep my mouth shut," serves no purpose save to steal further from you your life and peace. Few of us are able in any total sense to keep ourselves to ourselves, and if we try too hard to do so we will drive ourselves into a state of morbid imbalance of mind and emotion, which sickness will be anything but hidden. Jesus is not speaking here of hypocrisy as a weakness but as sin, and we do well to face up to the inevitable consequences of sin both in this life and the life to come.

However successful our playing of a spiritual part may be in this world, the first dawning of the world to come will tell all, and what a story it will be. None of these words are meant to trouble let alone torture any soul beset by the Devil's accusations about past sins. In Christ they are forgiven and are best forgotten and not spoken about. The message is: be honest with God and with others!

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### 12:4-7

Fear has torment (1 John 4:18 AV) and the fear of man is a snare (Prov. 29:25). But we have not been given the spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7-8), but the fear of the Lord is a clean and healthy thing, and the main part as well as the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). The only way to overcome dark fear is by a healthy fear. The fear of God is not fear of danger but the quiet acknowledgment of and submission to His absolute sovereignty. It is when we are persuaded of this fact that promises such as Isaiah 54:11-17 and Psalm 105:15 begin to distil their sweetness into life in a very practical way. It is a great comfort to realise just how little people can do against us in the end. They may kill us, as they have often killed the prophets, but if they do, have they robbed us? Have they succeeded in their evil design behind God's back? God has power for time and eternity, and while the eternal presence of God in all the pure fire of His holiness is Hell to those whose hearts are at enmity with Him, that same presence to the trusting soul speaks of the infinite personal care of One who numbers the little sparrows. How often in recent days we have had cause to quote Romans 8:31, 35-39. Fear God and dread nothing and remember that these sudden surges of awful fear which seem to paralyse you are the assaults of the Devil and must be refused and resisted in Christ's name. This is very practical.

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### 12:4-7

Fear is a terrible thing and we must say more about it. We may fear the oppositions of men and the necessity for fighting; we fear the unknown; we fear our own seeming weakness and incompetence and inferiority; we fear failure in service and witness, which Jesus speaks of in the next verses; we fear people and what they may feel about us and how they may evaluate our humanity as well as our spirituality. Now see how Jesus deals with this demoralising fear. He speaks of the knowledge of and care for the smallest of things on the part of the Almighty. Jesus then goes on to describe God's knowledge of us as being so exact that every hair of our head is numbered. Did Jesus smile when He said, "You are of more value than many sparrows"? In God's eyes you are not a "thing" nor a "nobody" but a person, cared for and valued. Note how Jesus in v.4 called His disciples His friends, and recall how this is elaborated in John 15:14-21. It is right that we should fear God as the great and mighty transcendent One but we must balance this with what He has revealed to us of His immanence, His nearness to and involvement in all the work of His hand. What a God to serve! He remembers our humanity and never asks too much. (Isaiah 42:1-4; 43:1-3).



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## 12:8-12

Keep in mind here Jesus' two-fold purpose of encouraging His disciples in the face of enmity and warning them against hypocrisy. Jesus had already told them of God the Father's knowledge of them and care for them. Now He says if they confess Him He will confess them before angels, so that there will be no doubt as to their identity, no fear of their being mistaken for worldly, unbelieving (though religious) hypocrites. And, for the future, even if put in prison, they would find that the Holy Spirit would be at their side to meet their every need at the critical moment. The whole eternal Trinity was engaged on their behalf in glorious intervention. Now since God was the most powerful factor in their experience, the question arises as to how much they were prepared to come out into the open and be known as God's people through Jesus Christ His only Son. Why should we ever be ashamed to confess Christ before men? Has He ever disappointed us or proved false to us or unworthy in His dealing with us? Over against this is Christ's confession of us made, not in a temporary world, but in the eternal presence of God and His angels. Must He not at times be ashamed to confess us, or at least more than a little disappointed? Of course here we are dealing with confession of religion that is unreal and hypocritical and we need Jesus' words in Matt. 7:15-29. But our last word must be about confession of Christ. Is it not time that with grace, seemliness, balance and yet firm conviction we should let it be known that we belong to Christ and that the highest objective of our lives is to please Him and honour Him? It is not a matter of aggressive evangelism but one of honest loyalty and grateful love to the Jesus to whom we owe everything.

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## 12:8-12

It is difficult in a brief note to deal fully with the subject of the "unpardonable sin" which has worried so many sensitive souls. But in a day of spiritual casualness it is necessary to speak of this matter, to the end that some might be drawn back from the dangers of a way of life that is imperiling their souls. The Holy Spirit is the active agent by whom the truth of God is brought to our minds and hearts, and to treat as false that which we know to be true and from God seems to be what is spoken of here as the sin against the Spirit. We are not speaking of mistakes we make, of sinful acts that are done, or even wrong thoughts that beset us and are indulged. We are speaking of that wilful refusal of the truth as it comes to us in powerful grace in a way that is recognised by men and confirmed by God. When we deliberately hold down the truth, preventing its saving operation in our hearts so that we can go on living as we choose, regardless of the fact that God is displeased: this is dangerous. It is an inner dishonesty which increasingly makes us incapable of recognising the truth about ourselves and we become silently and sinisterly hardened in a way that makes us incapable of repentance. The warning seems to be addressed mostly to those privileged by much knowledge of God's truth (Heb. 5:11-6:12) who have refused to grow up in grace. The Bible speaks of grieving, quenching and resisting the Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19; Acts 7:51). How solemn! But here, Jesus was comforting His men by saying that those who so sin with deliberate intent, branding the work of Christ by the Spirit as the work of evil, will not go unpunished. It is all very serious, a matter of life and death in this world and the world to come.

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## 12:13-21

Take only the first verse of today's passage and be staggered by the unfeeling, insensitive, total materialism that marked this man. In the middle of a spiritual address of solemn import this man revealed that not a single word had registered in his soul. All the time he had been preoccupied by property and possessions and it had never occurred to him that the word spoken had any application to him. The things that really mattered to this man were the things of this world and the immediate pleasure and administration of them. It was not that he was intending evil nor trying to gain what was not his by right, but in his life his soul was given over to "things". This is what happens every Sunday in Church. People seem to be listening intently but it seems that spiritual truth simply does not register. They never think of their souls, or if they do they just assume they will go to heaven even though their interest in God is minimal. They never wonder if they belong to Christ, nor if they have any inheritance in the world to come. They are total materialists and in all spiritual senses they are dead. Read 2 Cor. 4:3-4 and 1 Cor. 2:1-5, 14. The miracle of God's grace is simply this, that in the preaching of the



word of God there is dynamic to raise the dead so that people such as this man hear, and in hearing believe. Think of how Jesus called to Lazarus at the grave and he who was dead came forth. Read John 5:24-25 and Romans 10:13-17 and learn to pray for the preaching of the Gospel that the blindness and deadness might be taken away from the souls of men.

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### **12:13-21**

The first three verses here introduce the parable and we must read them carefully lest we think Jesus is refusing to intervene in a case of social injustice. Nor is it right to say that Jesus regarded the matter of the inheritance as belonging to Caesar's jurisdiction while He concentrated on higher and more spiritual issues. The spiritual condition of the man and his brother is made perfectly clear by their preoccupation with the inheritance. This was their treasure, there lay their hearts, and in consequence they were becoming more and more trapped and conditioned by their own philosophy of life. But this attitude ends in a man losing life itself and in the end losing his soul. This is why Jesus spoke to the man and to his brother with a real sternness in order to shake them out of their dangerous materialism. This is a lesson we all need to learn, because experience testifies that the more a man "gets on" in life the more danger there is that he will ease off, deteriorate and backslide spiritually. Covetousness is a subtle and powerful evil. One brother was cursed with this evil in that he refused to part with a penny, and the other likewise was cursed in his vexatious greed to grasp all his rights. Brotherly love, family reputation and personal standing were all sacrificed to covetousness as this sordid business was dragged into the full glare of publicity. These two men were already well on the way to being irretrievably lost because they conceived of life as being identified with things. But "things" include selfishness, indulgence, popularity, pleasures, houses, families, reputation and success, and all the while the worldly-minded may well be able to say that they have done nothing wrong, underhand or dishonest. What is your life?

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### **12:13-21**

In the business life of the man in the parable there is no suggestion of sharp practice and in his building up of a successful and profitable business he may well have been held up as an example to every aspiring youngster. While the emphasis of his life was the amassing of wealth, an objective he set for himself and pursued with diligence, the application of the parable may well be extended to include that philosophy of life which sets out to taste and to enjoy all that life has to offer. After all, idolatry of hobbies is as total as a passion for wealth. Being a Jew, this man may well have considered his material prosperity to be a sign of God's favour, just as the talented, in their wide and varied lives, sometimes consider themselves a race apart, rich in privilege. But in whatever category we may fall, if we lose our souls in the pursuits of life what are we profited? This man did nothing "wrong" but his whole concentration was on the wrong world. And when the time came for him to leave this world (as we all must) he had gained nothing he could take with him into the next world and had become a person whose only real dwelling place was this world or its eternal counterpart, which is Hell. Like the other rich man Jesus spoke of (Luke 16:19-31), this man never thought for a moment that all his riches could have been utilised to minister to others. He just never thought of others. He was totally self-absorbed. He claimed his life for himself and lost it (John 12:25; Luke 9:23-25; 1 John 2:15-17) and in doing so he lost his soul. He lived without reference to God and died without God; his eternal state was simply an extension of his earthly state, and he lost everything.

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### **12:13-21**

This section is a very pertinent message to our own generation of materialism and unbelief, and we all stand in danger of those subtle processes by which our hearts are won away from God. Note in the man's words to himself, "What shall I do?" a testimony to the essential restlessness of a life totally anchored in this world with no eternal dimension. Then, having spent himself in amassing the kind of fortune he had set his heart on, he prepared himself to enjoy it, although how he was going to do this remains a mystery since his "life" was his work. Had he lived the "many years" he expected he might have been a thoroughly bored man, for the finer sensitivities and capabilities of his "soul", having been neglected for years, were already dying, if not dead. Note

how unspiritual he was even in talking of his "soul" which he regarded as "his" along with all his other property. But we are not our own (Eccles. 12:7) and the summons came with inescapable finality, and his calculation of "many years" is seen to be wishful thinking. We must be realistic about life and its limitation, not least to be aware of how little time we may have (Ps. 39:4-6; Ps. 90:9-10; Job 1:21-22; 14:1-2, 14; 16:22; James 4: 13-15). This man's time came, he was summoned, he had no option, he had to leave all that constituted his life and he had to answer to the God whom he had ignored. He had lived for the wrong world and died a terrible pauper. He was indeed a fool. Daniel 5:23 AV is very searching: The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.

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### **12:22-34**

Wealth is as much a peril to those who do not have it as to those who have, because a spirit of fretful care and gnawing anxiety can well take the heart away from God. Jesus was not criticising that wise and careful spirit of balance and providence which is a necessary part of life and without which we degenerate into careless presumption or parasitical dependence. He was denouncing that obsessive worry about "things", often little things, that eats away the vitality of life and makes people so taken up with their "worries" that they are guilty of idolatry regarding them. Listen to some people talking about their worries and you would think there was no God at all, or at least only a God determined to destroy them. Worry is absurd, pointless and indeed pagan, and it accomplishes absolutely nothing (25). It is also dangerous to disciples, for anyone engrossed with a sense of insecurity and worry will have no heart for getting on with the work of the Kingdom. But worry is also sin for it presupposes that God is not our Father who cares. Jesus bids us consider the natural world with the birds and flowers and depicts them accepting their station in life and being provided for. Why then should we strain and struggle and fret as if we were left to do it all alone? Why be of anxious, troubled mind, full of doubt (29) and tossed about like a ship in a storm? That is behaviour to be expected from pagans who have no Father God but only a dead, unfeeling deity, stern and demanding. Our God is the Father everlasting.

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### **12:22-34**

Running right through this passage is a note of insistence on the care God has for His children being the antidote for fretful anxiety. "But the real cure for worry is to put first things first, to care more about God's Kingdom than about personal needs. Those who do so find that God provides for His servants, but they also find that the necessities of life are fewer and simpler than selfishness supposes." (Caird) Note how positive the command is in v.31. There is no contracting out of responsibility but rather the emphasis on the oft-repeated daily choice that the Kingdom and its concerns will have first place. This is not only a corrective to unbelieving fretfulness but also a strong incentive with regard to our temptations, which themselves can become an idolatrous distraction from God. That temptations will come is beyond question, and the strength of them is something real. But we must not waste good time and energy in speculating what the issue of the next temptation may be. That could well be a preoccupation that would make our fall almost inevitable. We must day by day, when the temptations are not vividly and insistently near, reaffirm our choice that God and His Kingdom will be ours. This is the thinking of faith which takes God at His word and believes His care, and the fruit of such thinking is the gradual (perhaps almost imperceptible) strengthening of the resolve of faith which is then prepared for the temptation when it comes. We must learn to use our minds in the business of Christian life and clear thinking is far more useful than blind worrying. After all, God is not a far-distant relative who has but the vaguest memories of us. He is a Father, present in power and purpose. More of this tomorrow.

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### **12:22-34**

"Even devotion to the kingdom is capable of breeding worry," (Caird). In terms of the world's standards of evaluation even the best of Christian works must seem small, insignificant and very unlikely to change the world. This is always the case. The Cross was a spectacle of weakness, as was the persecuted church in the Acts of the Apostles. Think of Paul's description of his experiences in 1 Cor. 4:9-13 and 2 Cor. 4:7-18; 11: 23-53. Now even though the faithful seem to be, and feel themselves to be, a little defenceless flock (and this is not

accidental - Matt. 10:16), they must have no fear because the stated purpose of the almighty Father is to *give* them the Kingdom. This is not only reassurance in the face of difficulties and enmity, but inspiration in the context of the actual outworking of that victorious kingdom, whose true dimensions will not be visible until Christ comes again together with all His saints. The last thing we should do is to hold on (33) selfishly to our spiritual possessions as if success was to be measured by the size of our work at any given moment. Hoarding, even in this sense, can be unbelief, whereas giving is of the essence of faith (Prov. 11:24-26; 2 Cor. 9:6-11; Luke 6:58). All we have must be regarded as being on loan from God and available for the work of the kingdom, and this is not the way of bankruptcy but the way of spiritual wealth which can never be taken from us and which never decays. What we really value we will go hard after, and our enthusiasm will be our testimony to the world. On this basis many set a very low value on Christ and His Kingdom.

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### **12:35-40**

What you really value becomes the dynamic of and the determinative thing in life and governs the pattern of your behaviour. Nothing is too much to give, do or endure in order to achieve your objective, even although the thing or person is not actually before your eyes at any given moment. The influence is there and this is the import of Jesus words about waiting for the return of the Master of the house. The expectation of the Lord's return, far from producing lazy complacency, should issue in preparedness for service. No matter how long that return may seem delayed, the decisive moment must not catch the servants napping. They must not be taken unawares like a householder sleeping while the thief breaks into the house. This exhortation to readiness applies to various crises of life and service as much as to the final personal return of Christ. Since Luke has been emphasising all along from 9:51 the coming crisis of the Cross, we see here a word of preparation for all service at all times. We never know when we will be called on to cope with colossal happenings, and it is for this reason that at all times our lives should be ruled by the constraining love of the Master whether or not He is immediately and obviously present and active. There should be no need for sudden scurries of preparation. The loyalty of love should in itself be enough to keep us watching and waiting; His love, if not ours.

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### **12:41-48**

The reference in v.39 to loss being suffered prompts Peter's question in v.41, for he obviously prefers to think of the Lord's return in terms of the blessing spoken of in v.37. It is difficult to think of the meaning of the returned Lord serving His servants, but with the help of John 13:4ff. and Rev. 3: 20 we see that it is the service of never-dying love. This does not cancel out the clear differences spoken of in today's verses. It will not be the same for all in that glorious day of Christ's coming, but Peter did not find it easy to think of disciples, including himself of course, suffering loss in that day. But during the Lord's absence (His bodily absence, for He is ever present by His Spirit), there are two attitudes to life which may be adopted by His servants. They may live in a certain way, doing their duty according to the strict letter of requirement because they fear being caught doing something wrong. If they thought they could get off with it they would be more than tempted, they would do the wrong. Fear is a powerful motive, and fear of the Lord is a clean and healthy thing (Ps. 19:9). But it is not the highest motive. Love is that motive which should impel us to do the Master's will and to be found rejoicing when He comes (2 Cor. 5:1-10; Phil. 1:20-26; 1 Thess. 5:1-10; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; 1 John 2:28). Love's anticipation of the arrival of the loved one is a thing of delight, not tension, unless of course love has been playing false. It is from the basis of loving that the parable goes on to speak of doing, and you can tell the kind of "love" by the "doing".

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### **12:41-48**

Jesus answers Peter's question by asking him a further question which focuses the challenge on Peter's own personal position, and with him all others who are aware of their spiritual privilege and capacity for service. A steward is a ruling servant, entrusted with authority and given to know the will of the Master. But if he uses that position for his own gratification, forgetting that he is only a servant, he will bring down upon himself the anger of the Lord when He returns. Such a servant will be taken unawares and his punishment and loss are spoken of in the most radical terms. He finds his place among the unfaithful (unbelievers, A.V.). Note that there is a clear

distinction made here as to the degrees of culpability and of consequent punishment. The first servant with callous heart used his position for his own ends (Ezek. 34:1-10; John 10:7-13). The second servant is guilty of lazy neglect for, knowing the will of the Master, he neither prepared nor acted (Heb. 2:1-4). The third servant seems charged with guilt for remaining in ignorance, or perhaps the blame rests more on the unfaithfulness of others from whom the ignorant one received no guidance. Certainly there is provision for the ignorant (1 Tim. 1:13; Lev. 5:17-19). The message of responsibility is clear not only in respect of ourselves and our privileges (48b), but also inasmuch as we are our brother's keeper (Heb. 10:23-25; 12:12-15; Gal. 6:1-10). Peter never forgot the lesson learned this day (1 Peter 5:1-4).

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### **12:49-53**

Consider the various types in the crowd around Jesus and try to imagine what they would severally make of these words. There were the angry antagonistic Jewish leaders, already decided in their attitude, bound to misinterpret everything said, thus exposing their spiritual ignorance and malicious motives. There were the somewhat disturbed disciples, filled with fears, hopes and a heavy sense of responsibility, possibly awed and a little frightened by what their Master now said. Then there would be a vast range of interest and understanding and idle curiosity among the crowds of ordinary people. Jesus would be aware of them all as He spoke of fire and division in respect of the people, and fire and baptism in respect of Himself. The disciples are not to expect an easy victory for the Kingdom, because the fire which enflames some with a love for God to do His will also consumes others with the passion of hatred and enmity. This is the division which is an inevitable accompaniment of every true work of Christ and which brings the pain of persecution into the most intimate family relationships (Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-21). It is sobering to go on in Christian service and to see just how deep and diabolical is the antagonism of unbelief. This is the fire that accompanies the work of the Kingdom but we must remember that fire purifies that which is true and good, removing its blemishes and making it more precious and lasting, as well as burning and destroying that which is evil. The fire of God is never negative. The people would at once link this word with the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11-12), and of course the idea of a Messiah who comes to judge the chosen people as well as the nations was not popular truth. But it is true.

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### **12:49-53**

Jesus' own life exemplifies all He has been teaching in earlier verses about being devoted in love to the will of another. He was a true man of flesh and we see in Him here a mixture (in faith, not unbelief) of impatience and reluctance that was in fact agony. "The prospect of His sufferings was a perpetual Gethsemane. While He longed to accomplish His Father's will, possibly His human will craved a shortening of the waiting." (Plummer). Consider John 12:23-24, 27-28. The fire of judgment Christ must bring is something that He Himself had first to undergo as He freely submitted Himself to the judgment of sin which is death. But why did Jesus speak of being straitened, constrained, or painfully compelled until it was accomplished? Was it simply the anticipation of the terrible cost involved in accomplishing the saving will of God who can never be reconciled to sin, or was there more to it than that? It is difficult to say. Tension there may have been between His willingness to do the will of God and His natural shrinking from the darkness (think of the agony of Gethsemane), but there was no basic conflict as evidenced by John 12:27-28. Could part of the deep sorrow of constraint be the awareness of Jesus that in going ahead to do the will of God in dying for the sins of men (which was His own free choice), there was also involved the deliberate decision and choice of the rulers of the Jews and their associates. In dying this death from which would flow the saving power of God to men Jesus was also driving men to their fateful decision. When people are so compelled to choose, their choice has eternal consequences. It is a solemn business to face them with the hour of decision. This is why "easy" evangelism is suspect!

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### **12:54-59**

When people do not want to see, there is little or nothing you can do about it. Such was the blindness of the Jews. Their perception and accurate assessment of things was swift when earthly things were involved, but in



this crisis day of the coming of Messiah they were totally blind (cf. 19:42). If the fire of judgment was about to be cast on the earth, people should have been urgently alive to the situation, preparing themselves to meet their God. All around them in word and work there were evidences that the Son of God was among them but they would not receive the evidence. They would receive neither the message of grace nor that of judgment, but they went on their way carelessly indifferent to what was coming. Jesus challenged the Jews with the illustration of the earnest efforts of men to come to peaceful terms with their adversary before the court of justice was reached. Should not spiritual issues in relation to God be dealt with in equal seriousness instead of people "hoping it will turn out well"? The picture in v.58-59 is really that of the insolvent debtor trying to settle his case out of court, since the only alternative was the utter ruin of being jailed with no prospect of paying off the debt and no possibility of release. The spiritual application is clear. All must cast themselves on the mercy of God, who has in Christ paid the debt. But what if people do not recognise that they are hopeless debtors? What if they turn their backs on the One who has paid the debt? What if they decline to take seriously the facts of judgment and the nearness of its coming? This is the blindness of unbelief, and in calling such people hypocrites (56) Jesus accused them of deliberate blindness. They would not take the place of the sinner which is the only place of hope. What is left? Judgment!

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### 13:1-5

When strong words of judgment are spoken there will always be those who will accept the truth only in the sense that it applies to others, especially those considered to be "great sinners" because some signal tragedy has brought about their death. Jesus makes plain that physical disasters do not mark out the sufferers as being worse than others, just as physical privileges (the Jews) do not mark out people as being better than others. All have sinned, and there are no exceptions (Rom. 3:9-20). The alternatives are repentance or judgment. We do not need to concern ourselves with the details of the two incidents, one of which was brought up by people in the crowd and the other by Jesus. The first refers to Galileans, traditionally rebellious against Rome. Having no doubt broken some law, they gave Pilate occasion to vent his bloodthirstiness and they were slaughtered in the Temple as they offered sacrifices. The other group, tragically killed, seems to refer to an accident during the building of an aqueduct at Jerusalem by Pilate with money stolen from the Temple. The point of the illustrations is the urgency of repentance and getting right with God. If these men had only known how near they were to death and judgment, they would have exercised real effort to escape not only from the human disaster but from the spiritual one to follow. Far too many live life assuming that the worst will never happen to them, But even if disaster does not strike, the truth remains that "it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment." Jesus is speaking here not so much about dying as about perishing. All must die, but all need not perish (John 3:16). This is the Gospel and *now* is the time to hear and believe. Tomorrow is too uncertain!

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### 13:6-9

This is a solemn message. The vine, fig and olive trees are all used as symbols of Israel. Here it speaks of the Jewish people, allowed still a short time to repent and to prove their repentance by the fruit of changed lives. In the fullest sense the message applies to all who remain unrepentant in spite of all God has said and done for their salvation. Time is running out. The fig tree normally attains maturity in three years and a tree still fruitless after that time is not likely ever to produce fruit. It is a dud! It is using up good ground, not only occupying room that could be used better by another, but exhausting the soil, drawing out vitality and giving nothing in return. The case for summary judgment is inescapable. But it is given one more chance; it is given a little longer; it is given rich blessing and encouragement even more than before in the hope that it will vindicate itself and prove that its place is justified and its continuance desirable. But if, after the little extra time there is no fruit, it will be cut down and burned because it is dead even while it lives. This is a word to all those who have the privilege of a place under rich ministry attended by the good blessing of God. Is the fruit of your life proving the validity of your faith? It may be that even now your position is being assessed in the courts of the living God. Your time may be very short. You may be marked out to be cut down, taken away, and replaced by one who will bring forth fruit to the praise and service of the Lord. Did not Paul speak about being laid aside as of no further use (1 Cor. 9:24-27)? Did not Jesus warn the Pharisees in Matt. 21:43? Another day or another week

may settle it, and if this be solemn for the backslider who is drifting in casual worldliness, how much more solemn for those who have never yet answered the call of the Gospel to come to Christ? The goodness of God (Rom. 2:1-5) and the long suffering of God (2 Pet. 3:9-11) do not always attain their objective. Give the tree a little longer .... if it bear fruit ..... if not ....! This is an important day.

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### 13:10-17

Consider this story first in relation to the woman and then to the ruler of the synagogue. For eighteen years this woman had been crippled and it is made clear that the cause of the condition was the influence and work of the Devil. There is no suggestion that the woman had been a bad woman before being stuck by this satanic infirmity and absolutely no indication that her condition these long years had had an adverse effect on her morally or spiritually. She is found in the synagogue during the teaching of the Law and Jesus refers to her as a daughter of Abraham, signifying the spiritual meaning of the phrase, namely that she was a woman of faith. There is no suggestion that the woman came that day looking for healing, as the ruler snidely suggested (14) for, after all, she had been coming to that place of dead and burdensome religion for eighteen years. That the synagogue had become such a place of totally unattractive (not to say unhelpful) religion is evident in the shamefacedness of Jesus' critics when they were refuted, and in the rejoicing of the people who must have been immensely relieved to hear of a God who cared for people more than for the rules of the synagogue. Jesus saw the woman, possibly the moment she entered the building, called her to Himself, and with utmost ease released her from her lifelong bondage. Note that Jesus said it was necessary ("should not", in v.16) and the word used is the same as when Jesus said, "The Son of Man *must* suffer". The meaning seems to be that in this day's incident there was a confrontation between the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God, and there must be no ambiguity about the issue. Christ is the unquestioned master, and the powers of evil must bow to His command.

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### 13:10-17

The kingdom of Satan is seen most clearly in the attitude of the ruler of the synagogue who resented the intrusion of this Jesus into his carefully preserved, rigid, undemanding (to himself) citadel of religion. We cannot but note the bitter inhumanity of the ruler's heart as he sought to proscribe any further demonstration of Jesus' power by appealing to the law of the Sabbath. But his appeal was twisted, as Jesus pointed out, for if it was lawful to do good to animals on the Sabbath, why then forbid the healing of the woman? So rigid can established religion become that the "status quo" becomes sacred, even in its impotence, and the harsh rules of men which overlay the saving precepts of God's law become an end in themselves. Jesus did not hesitate to expose publicly the hypocrisy of the situation and again we can understand why the Pharisees hated Jesus. A quiescent God who keeps His place and is given a routine of worship at set times and in set ways is one thing, but a God who interferes and makes the Sabbath a dynamic thing is not to be tolerated. But "the Kingdom of God has broken in on the kingdom of Satan and the work of liberating the victims of Satan's tyranny must go on seven days a week. So far from being the wrong day, the Sabbath was actually the best day for such works of mercy. For the Sabbath..... was a weekly foretaste of the rest which awaited the people of God in the kingdom, the final release from all bondage. To liberate men and women from the reign of Satan and to bring them under the gracious reign of God was therefore to fulfil the purpose of the Sabbath, not to profane it." (Caird) But some people do not like the power of God in whatever form or on whatever day it comes. That tells all about their religion.

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### 13:18-19

The two parables now given are meant to help us to understand the working and growing of the kingdom whose power had just been manifested in a miracle of mercy. In the mustard seed we have a word that tells us we must not underestimate the ultimate outcome of what at first may seem a very small beginning. Since people are always apt to be excited by miracle, and often obsessed by it, Jesus seems to have been saying that what they were seeing then was only the first beginnings. "It is the smallness of the seed in comparison with the largeness of the growth that is the point." (Plummer) "There is here no question of gradual growth. The mustard tree is

actually a plant that grows quickly. However, the points of comparison that come into prominence are the smallness of the seed, the irresistible vitality of the germinating seed, and the large size of the plant." (Geldenhuys) There seems to be emphasis on the ultimate vastness of the tree, its strength and the shelter it affords to the birds of the air, which very often symbolise the Gentile nations. We usually underestimate the work of God either through simple (if such a word can be used in this context) unbelief or because we are deceived by the smallness of the beginning. Few would be impressed by the *look* of a mustard seed, but think of the dynamic released once it has begun to grow! Again, keep in mind that the cause of Christ is always a minority cause and nothing could have appeared more unpromising and nearer being finished than a work with its leader on a cross. But appearances are deceptive, as are statistics! Judge nothing before the time. The mustard seed is growing.

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### **13:20-21**

The little mustard seed testifies to its life and power and growth very soon after it is planted and people cannot fail to see it. On the other hand the leaven is a hidden agent of power, working silently but penetrating the whole measure of meal. The amount of leaven is small compared to the mass of the dough but once the leavening process starts nothing can stop it until it is complete. The emphasis is again on the irresistible nature of the power of Christ's kingdom. Because of this there is no need of oft-repeated histrionics or demonstrations of power to prove success (Hab. 3:4). The beginning may seem to be ridiculously simple and even ineffective. But wait! In due time the life and power inherent in the seed and leaven of the kingdom will work and neither men nor devils can stop them. Whether we speak of the individual life or the work of God in any given fellowship the encouraging message is clear. It does not yet appear what we shall be (1 John 3:2) but what God has begun He will complete (Phil. 1:6), and the end result will take our breath away. The thing we must not lose sight of is that the work is going on now.

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### **13:22-30**

There will always be people who cannot visualise how a work can possibly succeed if there are but few signs of success and many signs of failure, defection and opposition. The man who asked the question here may have been one such or he may have been aware of the winnowing process attending Jesus' ministry and equally aware of the fact that while many in the crowds were enthusiastic, not all that many were committing themselves to the work. The man may have asked a genuine question, being exercised about his own salvation, or he may have been a cynical Jew having a stab at Jesus, or he may have been one of that very common type who like asking speculative questions about spiritual issues but who have no real intention of taking the matter seriously in a personal way. Whatever the circumstances Jesus did not answer the man directly (cf. Matt. 7:13-14) but issued a very real challenge. Keep in mind the earlier parables that dispel doubts and any suggestion of failure and think of such verses as Rev. 7:9 that tell of an innumerable company of the redeemed in the final kingdom, and you will see that in this passage it is the man and his colleagues who were put to the test, not Christ and His work. It is not a matter of interest in or association with a spiritual work that counts, but a radical, earnest and present commitment of life confirmed by the fruits of grace in righteousness of life. This is not a matter to be postponed and certainly not a matter to be presumed upon.

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### **13:22-30**

Be in earnest and be in time. This is how Jesus deals with casual interest in salvation, and He goes on to say that people can be within a fellowship and active in its affairs and yet be as far from Christ and salvation as any outsider. Indeed by sheer familiarity, which can so easily become that condition of being "gospel-hardened", the insider who "knows it all" may very well be further from the Kingdom than the outsider whom he presently despises. The start of the passage makes plain that there is an urgent and open invitation which must be taken seriously while the door of opportunity is still open. The time comes when it will be shut and all the pangs of conscience and all the tears of regret will be of absolutely no avail. People who saunter through life with an off-hand interest in things Christian, making a convenience of God when they feel in need of a little comfort and

help, will be disowned because they have ignored an open door. In like manner those who sit lightly to Christian service, manifesting a lethargy and lack of immediate desire to grasp the opportunities and privileges of service for Christ's sake, will likewise be shocked. They will find their places taken from them by those willing to be Christ's with enthusiastic abandon. No-one who wants to be Christ's and to serve Him will be cast out, but the proof of desire is earnestness and a grasping of the opportunity while it remains. One thing is clear. The work of the Kingdom will not be held back by human unwillingness. Unwilling persons, despite their profession and claims, will be laid aside; others will take their place, the work will go on, and in the process all will be seen for what they are.

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### 13:31-33

The Pharisees seem to have had a most intimate knowledge of Herod's intentions and it is difficult to believe their motives were genuine in delivering this warning. There are some people it is best not to trust even when they pose as friends and give "good advice". It may be that the Pharisees were acting in collusion with Herod since he would want to get rid of Jesus' interfering ministry and influence, and the Pharisees would want Jesus out of Herod's jurisdiction and into Judaea where He would be exposed to the power of the Sanhedrin. But all these men were making the mistake of assuming that the affairs of the world and of the Kingdom of God were in the hands of and under the control of men. They never are! Jesus' answer makes this perfectly clear. When the time came He would go to Jerusalem, and He would go by the clear choice of His own will and the inner compulsion of the Spirit of God for the completion of His mission of salvation. It would be in Jerusalem, the "Holy City", with its tradition of killing the prophets (Acts 7:51-53) that the Saviour would die. The whole plan was moving on according to time-table and the serenity of Jesus in the face of human and devilish threats is wonderful to behold. That work which is in the will of God will always be threatened and assaulted, but will never be in danger. The executive decisions are all in Christ's hands (John 13:27; Luke 22:53) and will be carried out until all is perfected. The programme is arranged and men such as Herod must be made to see their miserable insignificance and irrelevance. Jesus' comment on Herod's person would no doubt be reported to him. It was scarcely complimentary. The word "fox" signifies low cunning, an absence of straightforward dealing, and speaks of a second-rate person with no real character or greatness. Herod would not like Jesus!

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### 13:34-35

We read here the exquisite agony of unrequited love and we are reluctant to comment on it. Love cannot compel people against their wills and in the end must stand back and allow them to go into final destruction. Think of all the privileges of Jerusalem, all the knowledge of God, all the background history and religious tradition, all the glorious promises of God and all the disciplines of history. All failed to soften the hard heart of unbelief, and the main bastion against the Son of God was the religion of which Jerusalem was so proud. There is a dread defiance of the love of God in these verses and it is seen clearly if we extract the words, "I would .... you would not" (RSV). Keep in mind that this lament of love is concerned with a city, a people, an institution, a nation that had a long record of bitter failure and God-rejecting unbelief. We can scarcely imagine love like this. God is love! But this people would not have that love and the inevitable rejection of the rejectors was declared. Note how the Temple was not referred to as God's House but as *their* house. God was not there. This is desolation. The glory had departed and with it the Divine protection. This people had made their choice and, judging from their cries and jeers when Christ was crucified, were exultantly satisfied with it. But the time would come when with pangs of conscience the Jews, and the Gentiles, would acknowledge and recognise the Christ, but it would be too late (Rev. 1:7), When Christ comes in the glory of His Kingdom the exposure of unbelief will be final and without hope. Read Luke 19:41-48 and Rev. 6:12-17 and think very deeply about eternal things and your dealings with Jesus Christ.

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### 14:1-6

From 14:1 to 17:10 we have a section of material, almost entirely exclusive to Luke's account of the Gospel, which deals with the continuing debate between Jesus and the Pharisees. Although Jesus did not avoid the



Pharisees and rulers, in spite of their open hostility, He spoke to them and to all the people in such terms as to make it seem that He was deterring them from declaring themselves as His disciples. Yet at the same time, as is evident in this first incident, the initiative was always with Jesus and people found themselves confronted without hope of escape. Not even their silence allowed them escape for they were beaten. It became clearer and clearer that these people, refusing to accept Christ, would eventually crucify Him, and in due time they did. Today's incident is linked by Luke with 13:10-17 and some commentators suggest the invitation to a meal was in fact a deliberate trap set for Jesus, and that the sick man's presence was arranged as bait. It is not easy to decide about this but the trick, being an old one, is still used by wicked people who bring together individuals who are bound to come into collision. It is not easy to ask details about who is invited to a feast before accepting or declining the invitation. What we can do is to learn the poise and composure of Jesus so that the craftiest scheme the Devil concocts will hold no fear for us. Perhaps, even more, we must be like Jesus and give people the benefit of the doubt, as He did here to the Pharisees, accepting the invitation for their good and possible blessing. After all, how could weak, self-centred men like these harm the mighty Son of God? It was *their* foundations which were suspect, not His.

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### 14:1-6

It is interesting how arbitrary strict Sabbatarians can be in deciding what is permissible conduct. The phrase "eat bread" (AV) or "to dine"(RSV) seems to indicate a considerable table with many guests. Ellicott in his commentary says, "Sabbath feasts were then, as at a later time, part of the social life of the Jews, and were often (subject of course to the condition that the food was cold) occasions of great luxury and display. Augustine speaks of them as including dancing and song, and the 'Sabbath luxury' of the Jews became a proverb." So much for their Sabbath keeping out of loyalty to God! The Jews were also quite clear that "work" was not allowed, unless of course one of their beasts was in trouble. The use of the phrase "a son or an ox" would lay the charge of self-interest even more firmly at the door of the Pharisees. There is a tremendous lesson here about our tendency to forbid for others what does not appeal to or impinge upon ourselves. The only real way to keep the Sabbath is to make sure we are at the disposal of God for His work of mercy. Certainly, to be like these Pharisees and spend the Sabbath watching with eagle eye for someone to break the rules is not holy. It is wonderful to see how Jesus spikes their guns by the "innocent" question in v.3. If they said "Yes", He had permission to heal, but if they said. "No", they manifested an inhumanity to man that they would not show to beasts. Some suggest Jesus' words in v.5 accuse the lawyers of using their legal authority concerning the Sabbath as a means of asserting and displaying their power. Inviting Jesus to your house can be a risky venture!

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### 14:7-11

"Recognition eludes those who demand it and accrues to those who think more highly of others than themselves. True dignity is always unconscious dignity, and true honour, whether conferred by man or God, is always unexpected."(Caird) Jesus must have watched with sad amusement the scramble for the highest places, whatever these were, for it revealed the smallness and vanity of these men and their attitude to life. We remember it said of a public figure in the evangelical world, "He fain would be up among the angels, if he only knew who the angels were." What insecurity is present when people elbow themselves into prominence or indulge in "name dropping". If we spend our time justifying ourselves or comparing ourselves with others or fretting anxiously lest we are not recognised, we will lose all the pleasure and peace of life. Far better to be ourselves, "content to fill a little place if Christ be glorified" (A.L.Waring), and if recognition comes well and good. How sad it is to watch some, after a moment of glory, fading into insignificance (9). It is the Master of the wedding who gives the places and His word is accurate, final, and public. "Do not cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance." (Rom. 12:3 JBP). Read also 1 Cor. 4:3-7: 2 Cor. 10:12-13; 1 Pet. 5:1-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-25.

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## 14:12-14

These searching words strike at the heart of our social habits. Let it be admitted at once that there is a natural and legitimate tendency for those with similar interests and personalities to come together and to enjoy each other's company. But when this becomes an exclusive habit or, as in the case of the Pharisees, when it becomes a spiritual principle, it is an offence to God. Any "guests" the Pharisees invited had first to pass muster as being of the right class and suitable and, of course, likely to return the invitation. A great deal of what passes for hospitality is thinly disguised selfishness for we invite people who will give us pleasure, whose company we enjoy, and after it is all over we feel good. Such a pattern of social fellowship can very easily degenerate into a mutual admiration society. It will also be more than a little dull and essentially unsatisfying and we shall be on the watch constantly for some new acquaintance, of the right kind, to add a dash of flavour to our situation. Christian hospitality must not be like that. This does not for a moment mean that we must give friendship and hospitality only to those people we do not like and cannot get on with. That would be morbid as well as stupid. But it does mean we will have an eye (and a heart, for it is not a mechanical thing) open for the lonely and isolated and needy one and be prepared to make last minute adjustments so that he or she might be included in the care of fellowship. Too many people are allowed to stand isolated after services and to go off home on their own while we enjoy fellowship. Yes, they may be shy, difficult, prickly, argumentative and quite difficult to befriend. But have not our friends persevered with us when we were like that?

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## 14:15-24

The pious fraud always turns up and can be depended on to make his presence known by means of a loud, "Amen, Lord," as if to say, "Quite right, Lord, you and I agree." That is the atmosphere of v.15 where conventional piety speaks in loud complacency, so sure of its own invitation to the heavenly feast. It may well be that the man who spoke was very aware of all the effort of his life to make himself a good Pharisee, carefully meticulous about every point of the law, not enjoying it very much but comforting himself with compensatory thoughts about the pleasures and privileges of the Messianic kingdom. But this man was told plainly that he might well miss all the blessing of the kingdom because he was refusing the invitation to it, preferring his self-satisfied religion to receiving the Son of God. The background of the parable is the oriental custom of a rich man sending out in ample time invitations to a great feast. Considerably later, the initial invitations having been formally and politely accepted, the servant is sent to say that all is ready and to come now without delay, since delay would be an insult and a refusal. But those invited (think of the Jews and all the promises and invitations of the Old Testament and all those people nowadays who have "been in the church all their days") made excuses and would not come. This in eastern terms was not only a rejection but a declaration of war, and the master of the house took appropriate action. The contempt of the invited guests would not impoverish the feast, but the crowding in of the many who would be despised by their "richer" brethren would make the occasion joyous indeed. The others would find they had excluded themselves by their own choice.

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## 14:15-24

We must look briefly at the excuses proffered by those called by Christ to His kingdom and service. They are excuses, not reasons, and they signify both a lack of interest in the Kingdom and a lack of appreciation of it. These people were distracted from serious spiritual business simply because they were preoccupied with earthly business. Their real concerns were business, possessions and relationships. Jesus had already spoken of the dangers of the temptation of riches, the cares of the world and the pleasures of life, in Matt.13:22 and Luke 8:14, and they are real dangers. But none of these things needed to keep the people from accepting the invitation. The piece of ground had no doubt been well scrutinised before the Jew would part with the cash. But the man's real interest was his land. The oxen likewise were bought and the sale completed but there is just the slightest possibility that if they were not up to standard the man might have recourse to law to set aside the contract. A few days' delay would not be all that vital, but again the man's real interest was his farm. What of the man who had got married? Could he not have taken his wife with him? Had he not shared this side of life with her? Did they not have spiritual things in common? What on earth do some couples talk about? Was the wife not interested in such activities? How very sad it is to watch the dulling of spiritual life when there is an

unequal yoke (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Young people, be careful! Older people, counsel the young, and even better, lead them by example to follow Christ.

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### **14:25-27**

There is something devastatingly direct and logical about Jesus' method of dealing with people. The earlier verses tell of people who are constantly trying to qualify their response to the call to discipleship, and now Jesus makes it plain that if we are to follow Him we must choose Him unconditionally so that all other ties are subordinate. Matt. 10:32-38 puts the same challenge less starkly but we must not forget that since Christ is life, all that militates against Him is death. This raises a very painful issue, for some people make it quite plain that if we are to remain friends with them we must either part from Christ, or keep quiet about Him, or at least qualify our attitude to Him so that the human relationship will not be interfered with. This is often presented as an ultimatum by friends, family or congregation. Straight away we see the realism of Jesus' words here. The Old Testament expression of this spiritual principle is in Deut. 13:1-11 and we read these verses in the light of Israel being a people redeemed by God, owing their very life and identity to God, and being marked out for God's own possession. But there is another love that stands constantly in conflict with the claims of Christ: love for self. This is a deeper challenge to discipleship than love for others, although the two are very closely linked. For a man to bear his own cross is to give up his life of self-interest, to give self over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life becomes a pattern of the life of Jesus. There is nothing inhuman or morbid in this claim to supremacy that Christ makes. His loving loyalty to God His Father and His tender compassion for Mary His mother are shown clearly throughout the Gospels. Jesus made very plain that He would do the will of God even though in so doing He lost family and friends, and was persecuted to death by the powers of the world. Family and friends were precious to Him but never allowed to be competitors (Luke 2:48-51; Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3: 20-21; Matt. 16:21-23). Read today's verses again.

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### **14:28-33**

It is very important to take stock and to count the cost before launching into any venture, and the point of the two parables seems to be that anyone who fails to do this in relation to following Christ will in due time be confounded by his own failure. This kind of talk will not deter any real disciple, but will result in that disciple having a very incisive and decisive view of life and experience. When the way gets hard, such a disciple will not begin to complain, because he has faced up to the cost right from the beginning and he has also recognised the fact that there is a very real objective to be reached. Costly discipleship is not for nothing, whereas costly service to the claims of the world, the flesh and the Devil is progressively destructive and in the end you are left with nothing (cf. Rom. 6:16-23). Note how the life of discipleship is likened to the building of a tower open for the public to see, and also to a warfare in which the odds are two to one against. But there is no real mention of contracting out even though Christ here seems to indicate the opportunity. Forsaking all we have is not a step towards bankruptcy, for we have Christ, and He is everything (1 Cor. 3:21-23). For that reason we go on to prove in experience all that Christ is and gives, rather than go back to what we once were (John 6:66-69; Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16). Forsaking all is not a matter of cultivating a distaste or contempt for all the good things in life, which things are given to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). That would be perverse and unreal. But, on the other hand, we are not to be under the bondage of even the best of things, let alone of evil things (1 Cor. 6:12-13). The essence of such consecration spoken of here is handing over life in its totality to Christ, and thereafter being set free from its claims and complications. When we speak of the cost of following Christ we must think also of the riches He brings.

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### **14:34-35**

The challenge to discipleship in the previous verses points to a kind of disciple and a quality of life which is likened to salt. "Jesus' disciples are called to be the salt of society - preservative, seasoning, fertilizer; and there is no room in their ranks for those who lack the distinctive qualities of discipleship, any more than there is room in the kitchen cupboard for savourless salt, which like other rubbish in the east is thrown out into the street."

(Caird) We all recognise the necessity in our homes for seasons of spring-cleaning when the dusty accumulation of rubbish has to be disturbed and dealt with and the useless got rid of. It is realistic. Note here in the context of discipleship, that Jesus speaks of salt losing its distinctive flavour and of it being impossible to restore that tang. This is loss for which there is no remedy and since our Lord has been speaking strong words dissuading men from coming after Him when they are impelled only by a surge of emotion or excitement rather than by spiritual persuasion, we may well think that the salt has reference to spurious consecration. With the passing of time and the coming of testing some are revealed to be "synthetic" disciples and not the real thing. Where there is not the willingness to "forsake all" and go on with Christ, there comes inevitably a staleness and a lack of flavour or tang that suggests there is no real life of grace at all. There seems to be something wrong with that kind of person who is always calculating whether or not it is worth it to follow Christ. It seems they have not seen the immensity of their need nor the marvel of the grace of God towards sinners.

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### 15:1-2

All the stringent, searching words of Jesus could not keep away from Him the people who knew their need and grieved under the burden of it. Because they were what they were they knew instinctively that there was both life and hope in the words of the Man Jesus. They knew full well the unforgiving spirit of men such as the Pharisees who would gather their robes and hurry past lest they be soiled by contact with sinners. But at the same time they knew equally well that this Jesus was not content with expressing mere humanistic sympathy with them in their sin. Compassion for their suffering and miserable brokenness there was, but the deliberate desire and objective of separating them from their sins were there also, and they knew it. They came to Jesus to listen, and became aware of a holiness that was mingled with tenderest love. And, as they listened to these parables, they learned of a God who did not wait for them to make the first move of repentance and restitution, as the Pharisees did, but a God who came in Person to seek and to save what was lost. There must surely have been communicated to them a sense of being valuable in the sight of God in spite of all they had done and become. What a stirring of hope there must have been in these broken hearts. This note of hope must always be an element in our ministry and witness. If ever our "holiness" becomes brittle and self-absorbed, as in the case of the Pharisees, and if ever we communicate to sinners that we despise them for their miserable condition, and count ourselves a class apart, then we will cease to be of any use to God. We will have become salt that has lost its savour. The Pharisees, in their sick, cynical criticism, paid Jesus the most glorious compliment which in four words heralds the sweet message of the Gospel. "This man welcomes sinners." Aren't you glad?

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### 15:3-7

Keep in mind that Jesus was already on His way to Jerusalem to die, "the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God," (1 Pet. 3:18), for it is in His death above all else that we see the "seeking God". What we find in this parable and the next two is not a statement of the doctrine of the atonement, but a revelation of the heart of God and an illustration of the vastness and personal immediacy of the love of God. In some ways it is hard to believe that God sets such value on a sinner that there is thrill and rejoicing when one such is brought back home. Of course in the parable there is a clear criticism of the pious Pharisees whose attitude of fault-finding was far removed from joy in the salvation of sinners. Note carefully that the use of the concept "lost" signifies something that belongs to and has value for the shepherd and that the seeking of the shepherd was prompted by his pride in his possession, as much as by pity for the lost. The possession of the ninety-nine cannot cancel out the awareness of love for the lost one, nor does the urgent, costly seeking for the one suggest any neglect whatever of the ninety-nine. The reaction of the Pharisees to the words of v.7 can be imagined, for the stinging rebuke of their self-righteousness is scarcely veiled. But we are not concerned with the hard-hearted Pharisees but with the hungry, broken penitents gathered round Jesus. Think of the demoralisation of their lives and the hopelessness of being lost and the weakening of resolution as a result of years of wrong living. What chance was there of their coming back to God, of being restored and of belonging? The shepherd not only comes seeking, refusing to give up the search, He reaches the lost sheep and lifts it up on to His own shoulders and carries it right back to the fold. Such is the Shepherd's rejoicing that long before the sheep is back at the fold its



morale is beginning to be restored and its heart begins to be glad. What a Gospel for people who are so like sheep!

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### 15:3-7

Here is an illustration of how men and women get lost. How true the Bible is in likening us to sheep, and how uncomplimentary. All we like sheep have gone astray (Is. 53:6). How does it happen? There is an element of blind stupidity in human nature. The sheep never meant to get lost even though it may have meant to stray. It followed its nose, preoccupied by immediate gratification, and the existence of any fence of restriction registered no significance except that the grass on the other side was very attractive. This is human nature! The sheep never thought, until it became aware it was in fact lost, and then fear became the dominant element in its experience. This generated panic which only made matters worse, the frenzied threshing around serving only to confuse any remaining instinctive sense of direction and to enmesh it more thoroughly in the sharp undergrowth. We need not emphasise the darkness, the distance, the dangerous precipices and the ultimate predicament from which there seemed no possibility of escape. The propensity of human nature for folly, like the sheep's, is truly amazing but we should not be surprised by it in ourselves or others. The Bible is full of warning. What we need is a new heart, and this God gives in Christ when we are found by Him. Thank God the Good Shepherd comes looking, no matter the distance or the cost. But is it not true that a lost sheep can sometimes try to resist every effort to help it? The strength of the Shepherd's grasp may be sore and seem cruel, but it is the hand of rescuing love. It is safe.

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### 15:8-10

There are several interpretations of this parable including the one which sees the woman as representing the Church which is "the organ by which the Holy Spirit seeks for the lost; and which, being quickened by the Divine Spirit, is stirred up to active ministries of love for the seeking of souls." (Trench) This links the three parables of this chapter: the Shepherd representing Christ, the Woman the Church, and the father of the prodigal, God the Father. If this interpretation is correct some blame would attach to the woman for losing the coin. But this does not seem to fit in with the emphasis of these parables which concentrate on the earnest, active seeking for the lost and the rejoicing on the part of God over what was found. Other commentators go on to see in the coin some resemblance to the human soul, stamped with the image of the king, but now begrimed with the dirt of the floor and the image scarcely discernible. The coin seems to have been part of a hand or head bracelet, personal and precious, and spoiled by the absence of one part. The emphasis is again on the value of the one lost sinner so despised by the Pharisees (v.1-3). Think of the place and function of the church and remember the value of the one single member, without whom the whole is incomplete. If the one is so precious and necessary (1 Cor. 12:12-27) what care we should exercise and how quickly the search should start for the lost one.

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### 15:8-10

Without pressing the details of the parable to extremes, commentators point out the significance of the lamp being lit to dispel the natural darkness of the poor Eastern home with its earthen floor, possibly covered with straw, and with no windows. The lamp could be the light of the Word or the light of Christ and its being lit transforms the situation. But of course something else results. When the gracious work of searching for and retrieving the lost begins, just imagine the clouds of dust: raised in that earthy house and gauge the reaction of any in the house to the discomfort when their ease is so disturbed. Remember that accumulated dust is very dry indeed and in many churches the layers of dust conceal many a lost coin with the image of the king on it. But many would prefer the dust to remain undisturbed! The losing of the coin could have been a very simple happening, perhaps not noticed for some time and, obeying the laws of gravity; it would drop, roll and come to rest just as human nature can do. But at once, although the coin has still its same value, it is out of circulation, its value is now theoretical, it is not available for use. It would lie there unaware of any cause for alarm, getting increasingly covered with the soil and straw, with no hope of any future, but for the care of the seeking owner.

Read the marvellous passage in Ephesians 2:1-8. If we have been "found" in this way, should we not have eyes to seek the lost and hearts to care and to rejoice?

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### 15:11-16

Note carefully that the story is about *two* sons who were both lost to the father, one in a far country and one behind a barricade of self righteousness. The younger son was totally selfish in his reckless love of life, seeing no reason why he should be denied any pleasure he fancied, but failing to realise that this leads to emptiness rather than satisfaction (Eccles. 2:1-11). The elder son asked for nothing, desired nothing, enjoyed nothing, considering himself the model of dutiful sonship, yet he was so totally the centre of his own life that he was quite incapable of entering into his father's joys or sorrows. When you think how instantly the elder brother later attributed profligacy as well as extravagance to his younger brother, with no evidence except hearsay, it seems possible that the elder son's insufferable self-righteousness might well have been part of the reason for the younger lad leaving home. But there was no excuse for the younger son's heartless and materialistic claiming of his share of the inheritance and his immediate departure. He was as stupid as he was heartless, for he left home to find freedom and found only that he was in greater bondage to his own personality, to his circumstances, to the dictates of ravenous "friends" who simply made use of him, and to all we mean by the power of sin. This lad's rebellion against the Father's will did not lead to life or freedom as he had expected, but to a life of rapid waste and progressive destruction of personality which led in turn to utter humiliation in which no man would help or could help.

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### 15:11-16

There is no mention of the mother in the story, no doubt because it is a parable about the love of God the Father. Were it a merely human story we would wonder about the domestic situation, for this undoubtedly causes some children to be prodigals. Sometimes it is the parents who are the problem, total in their individual selfishness, and it is only the love of the children for them that keeps the home going. Such parents never see the sadness in their children's faces and often pride themselves on having given their children everything; everything except that love and security which enable the children to grow up into their own independence of character. There is no such parental defect in this story and the young man's swift departure as far away as he could indicates the restlessness of desire that had burned in him for a long time. He wanted to live, but did not know what life was, mistaking it for "kicks" (which made him kick out against everything and everyone indiscriminately). He was motivated by a desire to taste the unknown and the forbidden. The so called liberation of youth is as old as the Garden of Eden! Would that we could get through to the young to tell them this! The dividing of the inheritance was quite a normal Jewish custom, but the boy was perhaps shaken when the Father allowed him to go without argument. He got all he wanted, did everything he fancied, free from rules and restrictions, and he did not like it. It was costing him everything and giving him nothing. He was lost in every sense of the word, and now, in a distant country, he knew it. It was when this painful reality began to dawn on him and to be acknowledged that his thoughts turned to home. But it took time, and the Father did not interfere except in prayer. This ravenous greed for indulgence not only exhausts the individual but drains the society he is in so that the end is famine. He never intended ending in the pig-sty; few do, but it happens.

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### 15:17-24

Why did it take the prodigal so long to turn his feet towards home since his thoughts were already there? He had to come to terms not only with his situation but with himself, and it is not easy to be honest with yourself when you have made such a total and public mess of your life. But the exhaustion which comes from sated desire and lustful indulgence can be conducive to realism and can lead, as in this case, to a man doing the strongest thing he has ever done. In spite of his fear of friends, fear of his family, particularly the brother, fear of not being accepted (why should the father take him back?), he decided to go home. It was a long road home, alone with his shame, doubts and fears, and no doubt with a devilish stirring of the temptations and lusts that had first enticed him away. It must have been agony. What he did not know was that the Father was watching and

waiting. He rehearsed his confession of unqualified guilt (17-19), by which he accepted that he had forfeited all right to life as a son. His pride and sin were brought home to him even more devastatingly when he realised that the Father had remained true to him in love all the time of his absence. No-one but a prodigal can understand the reaction, and the depth of feeling, when the Father runs to meet the wastrel. Note that they met "a long way off" from the house and it was in private that the son made his abject confession. Then, when repentance was manifestly evidenced, the son was led home to restitution, love, trust, service and joy. It is not enough for prodigals to be miserable and to want away from their sorry lives, for that leaves the sinner's heart unchanged and it would be only a matter of time before the memories of the disaster of sin faded and there would be a repetition of the defection. There must be repentance.

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### 15:25-32

This is a very sad passage and we cannot but feel that the son in the field may well have been brooding somewhat contemptuously or angrily on the father's continuing love, desire and longing for the prodigal. He knew nothing of the father's excited rushing along the road. If he had known he might have sneered. He knew nothing of the tragic but genuine repentance of the one-time arrogant youth, nor would he have believed it genuine. Nor would he know of the full restoration of his brother, which he certainly disapproved of. There was no forgiveness with this man! And too many are like him. Make one great blunder and some will never let you forget. Thank God He is not like that! "The elder son displays an unattractive facet of his personality with every word he speaks. When he hears the merriment, his impulse is not to join in but to ask for an explanation. The news of his scapegrace brother's return sets him thinking of his own rights and deserts, jealously supposing himself to be wronged because his brother is treated with more than justice. When his father pleads with him, he interrupts with a harsh protest, which contains perhaps more truth than he intended - 'Look how many years I have slaved for you'; working for his father has been an unrewarding servitude, and the obedience he is so proud of has been slavish and mercenary, never filial. He disowns his brother, calling him 'this son of yours', and putting the worst possible construction on his conduct .... The father refuses to be forced into taking sides with the one brother against the other; with all their shortcomings he loves them both and has never ceased to regard them as sons, though each in his own way has tried to contract out of his place in the family. He administers the gentlest of rebukes: his dear son who has remained with him all along should have understood him well enough to share his joy over 'this your brother'." (Caird)

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### 15:25-32

It was a real work of God's grace and mercy that the elder son was kept in the field, out of the way, for if the prodigal had met him before he met the father it would have been disastrous. This raises the question of our own usefulness to God in the rescuing, retrieving and restoration of sinners. Are we a help or a hindrance? There is something terribly cold and almost inhuman about the elder brother. His immediate reaction to the sound of merriment was disapproval, possibly because it signified money being spent, or because he had not been consulted, or because he felt all should have been working in the field as hard as he had been doing. Possibly all these elements are there and they signify a man who is always so busy "doing" things that he has no time to "be" anything. It seems the man was almost more of a machine than a true person, but perhaps the man *chose* to live this kind of life rather than to give himself in the fellowship of love to the father and the family. Of course, being too busy is a marvellous excuse for not giving ourselves to people, and the elder brother's complaint (29) does not ring true. He could have had all he wanted at any time, for the whole estate belonged to him (31). But do you think this kind of man had any friends at all, or any of the kind of friends who would be human enough to enjoy a party? It is a terrible tragedy when our religion ceases to have heart and when people no longer matter. We become inevitably aloof and disapproving like the elder brother. We have no desire to suggest that the wild and loose living of the prodigal is "better" or "less dangerous" than the stifled life of the elder brother. Both broke the father's heart! But the younger man was essentially more human than the other and in that there was more hope for him. At least we know the young man came back home, but the entreaty of the father may or may not have had similar effect on the elder brother. Remember Jesus' words in v.7 and 10.

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### 16:1-13

This section, which follows on closely from the stories in chapter 15, simply bristles with difficulties and pages of commentary could be written. The main thrust of the parable seems to be concerned with those who are preoccupied with material things to such an extent that eternal issues are quite forgotten. When such people are meticulously religious, especially with regard to secondary matters of outward appearance and conformity rather than the heart of God's law, strong words are needed to expose their falsity. This word is aimed at the Pharisees and constitutes a warning to the disciples. The unrighteous mammon (9 AV) refers to worldly wealth and the parable shows how quickly this can change. In v.9 the N.E.B. refers to the time "when money is a thing of the past". The love of money (1 Tim. 6:6-10), the deceitfulness of riches (Matt. 13:22), the fascination of this temporary world (1 John 2:15-17), and the materialism that insinuates itself so powerfully into our thinking (James 4:13-15) are things which corrupt deeply (James 5:1-5). There is something ruthless and inhuman about people who are so dominated by the material that those they should be ministering to are simply forgotten. But such forgetfulness is culpable and, as the chapter goes on to say (v.19ff), it has consequences that are eternal. This is the kind of thing that can cost a man his soul, and the emphasis of today's passage is directed against the Pharisees and all like them who are so obsessed with the present that the eternal future is ignored and lost. This was not so with the clever rogue of a steward. He prepared for what was to come. It is *this* the man's master commends, not his dishonesty.

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### 16:1-13

On the face of it v.9 seems to contradict the message of Scripture concerning not loving the things of this world and it seems to declare a doctrine of salvation based on works of charity. But what was said yesterday sets the parable in its true context. The actual parable seems to stop at v.8a and thereafter we have comment by Jesus. This is important, else we would have Jesus commending the trickery of the rascally steward. In fact Jesus was using His astute observation of worldly businessmen to point the lesson of earnestness with regard to the future and to expose the hypocrisy of the false religious reputation of the Pharisees. The steward wasted (the same word as in the story of the prodigal) his master's goods. Having been in a place of trust over another's riches (as the Pharisees were in trust with God's riches) the steward had made life easy for himself rather than profitable for his master. Being too soft for hard labour and too proud to beg, he set about falsifying the accounts, putting each of the debtors under personal obligation to himself, so that when the crunch came they would be obliged to take him in and look after him. What a lesson in self-interest! And this, of course, was the attitude of the Pharisees whose dealings with the things of God were calculated to advance themselves and not the people they were supposed to serve. This is an exposure of the Pharisees whose attitude is devastatingly dealt with in Matt. 23:1-31. They were experts at evading the intention of God's law without transgressing its letter, thus being able to be rogues and "saints" at the same time.

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### 16:1-13

The subtlety of the situation centres on the Jewish law forbidding them taking interest on loans from Jews (Deut. 23:19-20; Ex. 22:25-27 Lev. 25:35-38). "The Pharisees, who had large financial and commercial concerns, had found ways of evading the intention of the law without transgressing its letter. They argued that the purpose of the law was to protect the destitute from exploitation, not to prevent the lending of money for the mutual profit of lender and borrower." (Caird) With typical Pharisaic casuistry they reasoned that provided a man had a handful of meal and a little cup of oil he was not destitute and a loan, with huge rates of interest, was quite in order. The steward would arrange it all and the note of the contract: (with no mention of interest of course) would be the evidence of what was to be paid to the business "partner". It was clever and ruthless. But the steward, serving his notice, was more clever and called the debtors, tore up the contract notes and replaced them with new ones which stipulated only the capital sum, thus releasing the debtors from the interest which, from the figures given, was very substantial. The steward had gained good friends. The master, having no written proof of the larger sums being owed, commended the steward, ratified his actions and so received a reputation for being a good and pious Jew observing the laws of usury: "Like many another rich man whose wealth has been amassed without too much scruple about business ethics, he was ready to make spiritual capital



by a munificent gesture, especially when no other course was open to him." (Caird) The human heart is very deceitful and expert at keeping Christian principles from interfering with business. We remember referring to a wealthy Glaswegian who was a great supporter of evangelical causes in the city, and a lecturer in economics added, "He also had a reputation for paying the poorest wages on Clydeside." God looks on the heart.

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### **16:1-13**

The last four verses are very challenging and need little comment. If the worldly minded steward used another man's money to such good, though selfish, ends, should not a good man use what God has given him in terms of worldly possessions not for selfish gratification but for service of those all around? Neglect in this realm is inexcusable as Jesus made plain in Matt. 25:31-46. But note in that reference how unselfconscious those were who had ministered to the needy, and to Christ in the needy. There is always the temptation to be grandiose in our humanity as well as our spirituality but Jesus' test is in respect of faithfulness in little things. If we cannot be found faithful, for example, in an earthly job, do we think God will entrust us with valuable spiritual work? If we grasp for ourselves all the "mammon of riches" God gives us, are we likely to be good stewards of spiritual riches? It is equally true to say that if we are in fact faithful to God in terms of spiritual issues we will neither be selfish nor forgetful in respect of the other kind of ministering on a human and material level. What Jesus seems to be insisting on is that there is no hope at all of concealing what we are in relation to God. Choose your Master! You cannot have both God and Mammon. "Do we use our worldly possessions in such a manner that there will be persons in eternity who will be glad to receive us? Or will there be numbers who will point. accusing fingers at us because we neglected or injured them through our unfaithful conduct in connection with earthly goods entrusted to us?"(GeIdenhuys) Jesus seems to be insisting that worldly goods however acquired constitute a menace, for they are the rival of God for the heart of man. The only safety is in seeing ourselves as stewards of what we may consider our wealth in order that it might be used in the service of others.

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### **16:14-15**

The covetousness of the Pharisees as a class is well attested. What is more, they considered their wealth to be a sure sign of God's blessing on their spiritual superiority, whereas it was simply a fruit of their devotion to money-making, often with scant regard, as we have seen, for the ethics of the law. Jesus' words must have cut deeply and they produced a public display of derision. Now people do not generally deride what they despise for that can be ignored, treated with: the contempt it may well deserve. But they will express obvious derision in respect of what they fear, if only to try to persuade themselves that they need not fear. But they should fear such an One as Jesus for He drives home the mighty impact of His words in public, not simply to shame and discomfit these hypocritical men, but to deliver the common people from bondage to their ruthless regime. But the Pharisees were also in bondage, for to be motivated by a desire to gain the approval of men is anything and everything but liberty. Indeed, it can be utter humiliation, for in order to keep men's favour you have at times to keep silent about or even deny your most dearly held convictions and principles. This is an awful snare for those called to the holy ministry. If such people exercise their ministry to persuade others that they are great characters, or to gain a reputation among the "best." people, they will either destroy themselves or demoralise themselves to such an extent that they are left with nothing but a feeling of contempt for themselves. They will also be aware that the very people they have tried to curry favour with have the same low opinion of them. Have pity for the "show-off" for he is always trying to prove to himself that he is not nothing. Jesus makes it plain that the pursuit of human recognition is nothing but idolatry in God's sight. How could it be otherwise since it puts "self" at the centre of the universe?.

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### **16:16-18**

Right through this chapter there has been a note of urgency sounded and an insistence that opportunities must be grasped when they are presented. The appearance of John the Baptist had signified that a new dispensation had begun. Before this the kingdom of God had only been promised and prepared for, and people could only wait in hope for its coming. But now, in Christ, the kingdom had burst in upon people and they had to recognise it and

grasp it, pressing their way at whatever cost through every hindrance. It is only those of determination, earnestness, self-denial and faith who will enter in through the strait gate. Many in fact were doing so; many of them called "publicans and sinners" while the proud, religious Pharisees and Scribes not only refused to enter but did everything in their power to stop others entering (Matt. 23:13-15). A new day may have dawned but this does not mean that the revelation of God under the Old Covenant is set aside or rejected. Its authority still stands and, while all the accretions authorised by the verbal and moral gymnastics of the Pharisees may be swept aside as having no authority from God, the Law of God abides in fullest authority, not to be trifled with in even the minutest point. Jesus' words about forcing our way in remind us that earnestness is vital. In entering the kingdom we are embarking on a life which makes colossal demands as well as offering infinite possibilities. It is a revolution in which human opinions and inclinations must defer to God's spoken will. It is immensely practical. This is why many people do not like Jesus. He is too uncomfortable to live with.

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### **16:16-18**

Many find difficulty in the subject of divorce being introduced here but this need not be if we recognise that the subject is really adultery, and that it is spoken of against the background of the very high moral standards of the kingdom of God. It was common knowledge to those listening to Jesus that the Pharisees allowed divorce on even the most trifling of grounds. It was an age of easy divorce, like our own day, in which when marriage becomes an inconvenience or a hindrance to the satisfying of personal desires for freedom or for lust, then marriage must go. The question of moral and spiritual responsibility to self, to wife or to children, let alone spiritual responsibility to God and to the creation ordinance of marriage is simply swept aside. The ideal which Jesus taught, setting the alternatives in most radical language, is undoubtedly lifelong marriage between one man and one woman. The corresponding passages in Mark 10:2-12; Matt. 5:31-33; 19:3-9 make reference to the concession made by the Mosaic Law because of adultery, and Jesus says this concession was on the ground of "hardness of heart," in people's selfish dealing with each other. But the Pharisees had made the concession almost a rule so that the man (but not the woman) might put away his partner for the flimsiest of reasons. It was an attitude which refused the slightest restriction of personal self-pleasing. But Jesus insists that in all our thinking about this matter we must start at the highest point of radical obedience to the will of God, and only in submission of heart can such matters as divorce be considered honestly. This is too big a subject for these notes to deal with worthily.

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### **16:19-31**

The emphasis of this story is not to satisfy curiosity about life after death, nor even to argue the existence of both heaven and hell, but to bring home the importance of the present and to show how the present determines the future in an irreversible way. Note how closely this story (it is not called a parable) follows on from what we have been studying. This man's wealth and religion had provided him with glorious opportunities which had not been grasped and eternity revealed his whole life to have been a blunder. This man was esteemed by others and reckoned to be successful in the fullest sense according to man's measurement. But in the world to come his failure and bankruptcy could not be hidden. Commentators suggest the man was a Sadducee, because of his high social standing and his manifest disbelief in a life after death. He must have received a terrible shock when he died, for he certainly was not at rest. Here is a man who lived for this life and the pattern of his activity was flamboyant and ostentatious every day. Theoretically, he and his family were doctrinally orthodox and no doubt the synagogue would look for a good donation from time to time. But God was not in all his thoughts. "Let us eat, drink and be merry"(Eccles.8:15) was his philosophy, and he declined to think of dying. We are not told any specific sin of dishonesty or immorality yet he landed in hell. Now it was not because he was rich that this happened but because of what his riches did to him and made him. Read Luke 18:24 and 1 Tim. 6:1-11.

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### **16:19-31**

The picture of the poor man stands in contrast to the rich man and adds to his condemnation. It is scarcely possible to imagine that the rich man failed to see the beggar at his gate, but seeing him, he failed totally to

register any compassion whatever. That the rich man could live with sumptuous abundance yet never feel impelled to help the beggar is an evidence of how completely his own enjoyment of life had anaesthetised his feelings of humanity. As far as the rich man was concerned the beggar just did not exist, and this gives the lie to the rich man's religion (1 John 3:16-18). You begin to see why he landed in Hell. But we need to be careful here. The poor man did not reach heaven because he was poor, but because he was a true son of Abraham, that is, a man of faith. It seems essential to the story to believe that the poor man's costly misery of life served to cultivate his faith rather than to make him bitter and complaining. This is indeed a triumph of grace and it contrasts with those whose poverty is often self-inflicted because they are of the mind that whatever is held at any given moment should be spent. Such persons are usually very bitter towards those who are rich and there is a real element of jealousy in their attitude. Who knows what they might become if God gave them riches! This may explain in part our human situation. God has many riches to give us, but to what extent is it safe for Him to give them? The dispositions of providence are in God's hand alone and for purposes of positive grace rather than as precautions against misuse He gives and withholds. Read Proverbs 30:8-9. The only way to cope is to be like Lazarus, and to set this life against the background of the life to come.

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### **16:19-31**

When you think of how Lazarus longed to be fed with crumbs from the rich man, only to be disappointed, and of how the dogs may well have increased his misery, and of how this sore condition persisted right through life, and of how that man of faith must have cried to God for explanation and for relief, you cannot but be relieved at the total reversal of fortune in the world to come. There is an immediacy of blessing for Lazarus (22), whereas the reference to the rich man's funeral (costly and pompous?) seems to signify an ominous end to all he had and was. The rich man was in Hell, in torment, conscious of himself and of his infinite distance from the happy blessedness he had hoped would be his, and also consciously recognising the poor beggar who had lain at his gate! Note that he had been aware of the poor man and his need all along and had chosen to ignore both, perhaps despising the faith of Lazarus as being too spiritual and other-worldly, taking the Word of God too seriously and literally. But now it is Lazarus who is rich and in a position to help, for the rich man sees that his wealth was a lie and all his cravings, so indulged in life to no real satisfaction, are intensified into agonising frustration. Do not lose sight of the fact that this is what the man had made himself by his deliberate life-choice. In eternity, he is no different. He is still the self centred man whose one concern is now to escape the misery which has become his eternal condition. But there can be no remedy. A great and eternal gulf is fixed between those who die in faith and those who die in unbelief. Unbelief makes its choice of worldliness which excludes God and men alike and lives only for self. Eternity is a projection of time. This is why our choices are so important.

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### **16:19-31**

The closing verses of this story portray the rich man still no different in his attitude even though he finds himself in a place of painful retribution. He would still regard Lazarus as a servant to be made use of to run errands in the interest of the rich and he seems to suggest that the reason for his now being in this place of torment was lack of opportunity. There is a veiled slander against God, for the man suggests that if only he had been told plainly, as he now wishes his brothers to be told, he would have taken the steps necessary to avoid his sad fate. This is not true, and his life had been full of opportunity and privilege which had done everything except turn his heart towards God. His brothers had the testimony to eternal truth and principles in the Scriptures, and if they were not disposed to receive God's word in that way, neither would they receive it even if someone came to them with first-hand information about life after death. This truth is amply illustrated after the resurrection of Christ, for even then the majority of the Jewish leaders refused to believe. The Jews were always asking for a sign to confirm the truth of the Gospel, as if God was some untrustworthy felon whose plain word was not to be taken as valid. But when the sign was given, these men persisted in unbelief and this was their judgment. They did not want God. They had no place for Him in their scheme of life. There was no place for them in God's place of blessedness, only righteous retribution. "If men are not persuaded on moral grounds of

the reality of divine judgment, they are hardly likely to be convinced by apparitions." (Caird). Dealing with the Word of God is something which has mighty issues. It must be done honestly and worthily (2 Cor. 4:1-12).

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### 17:1-2

Here begins a section of very searching instruction given privately to Jesus' disciples and today's verses carry on the theme of responsibility which dominated the last chapter. We could almost imagine this lesson linked with the suggestion by the rich man (disallowed by Christ) that his ultimate loss was the responsibility of those who had failed to witness to him clearly. Jesus here warns against the sin of causing others to sin. The various translations of v.1 speak of "temptations to sin", "pitfalls" or "causes of stumbling", or the many things that lead to sin. The reference to "little ones" (2) is more concerned with new disciples, such as returned prodigals, poor beggars or repentant publicans, than with little children, although, of course, the latter are by no means excluded. One of the heartbreaks of spiritual work among the young is the awareness that parents, friends, schoolteachers and even ministers are busy sowing seeds of doubt in children's minds about the authority of God's word and the authenticity of spiritual experience. This is evil work and Jesus utters a solemn warning against it. It would be better for such an one to suffer a violent death before he was able to harm one precious life, for in this way he would avoid the sin and the punishment that will surely follow. Matt. 10:40-42; 18:1-10; and Mark 9:41-50 could well be read here, not least to show us that Jesus takes life and its issues very seriously.

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### 17:1-2

Take these verses again together with 1 John 5:19; Eph. 6:10ff; Luke 22:1-5, 31; John 13: 21-30; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:10-11, to name but a few illustrative references. We seek to emphasise Jesus' tremendous realism as He addresses Himself to human experience in the world. Offences, that is causes of stumbling, must come because evil, personal, positive, human, demonic and powerful is operative in human experience, and it has both earthly and eternal complications and fruits. Think of such persons as the Maniac of Gadara, Judas Iscariot, or Caiaphas the High Priest. Now in the providence of God evil is permitted, and yet it is contained so that eventually it is, and ever must be, a servant of God's purposes of good and of salvation. But in today's verses Jesus draws attention to the fact that evil is always seeking opportunities to work its own will to the detriment of human lives and in opposition to God's eternal kingdom. This will always be so until the Devil is finally brought to his appointed end (2 Thess. 2:1-12). Evil must operate but woe to those who give evil its opportunity by the defects (both positive and negative) of their lives. Note that Jesus is concerned here not so much with the assaults of evil against our own lives, but assault through us on the lives of others. Both for ourselves and others we need realism, not least to recognise that God, seeing where we are going, sometimes smites us rather than allow us to pursue a way of destruction.

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### 17.3-4

The theme of forgiveness follows on closely from the opening two verses, because an unforgiving spirit, that continues to accuse, refuses to give the sinner any hope and drives him to despair. But if we have to guard against a harsh unforgiving spirit that refuses to forgive *and* to forget, we must also guard against the spirit that suggests sin and wrong do not matter. Note the words in the passage- rebuke, repent and forgive- and note also the repeated protestations of repentance in v.4. If we find ourselves saying, "He does not deserve forgiveness," remember that this is our own exact position in relation to God. If we ask how often we are to repeat the forgiveness when a brother really does something sore against us, we seem to be more concerned with our own hurt than with what is making a brother act in such a contradictory way. There is no place at all in this for the all too common happening of "saints" slandering other "saints" behind their backs. There is no profit in this except for the Devil who will not be slow to make capital out of it. The passages to study in this theme of forgiveness are: Matt. 6:14-15; Prov. 17:10; Col. 3:12-13; Eph. 4:30-32; Mark 11:25-26; Matt. 18:15-17, 21-35; Matt. 5:21-24. Never forget that the true end of forgiveness is the breaking away of the sinner from his sin. Go and sin no more! To be allowed to share, at whatever cost, in this kind of work is privilege indeed and we must see it as



such. This is the significance of Gal. 6:1ff. Restore the broken, dislocated, suffering sinner in a spirit of meekness and gentleness, remembering God's own infinite kindness to you.

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### 17:5-6

What Jesus has said about not causing others to stumble, and about repeated forgiveness, impresses the disciples deeply and they express their reaction. It seems strange that they should ask for an increase of faith rather than love but the disciples recognised that it is faith which relates all actions and attitudes to the unseen, spiritual and eternal world and this is the real dynamic of action. Some suggest that the disciples' words were a form of escape or excuse, as if they were saying, "Lord, we are not at this high spiritual stage yet." But Jesus retorted that they had faith, and that faith the size of a grain of mustard seed is sufficient if they would but use it. Faith is qualitative not quantitative. The seed has the principle and the power of life within it and its growth will not be denied. Indeed the growth of the plant from the seed can split rocks in two! The mulberry (or sycamore) tree was supposed to have roots that were extraordinarily strong and to uproot it and transplant it in the sea signifies a double impossibility. But with God nothing shall be impossible. It is not *our* faith but the God of our faith who has the power to work mightily and that God will never yield up His power to us. But at the same time we have Jesus' words, "According to your faith be it unto you." (Matt.9:29) What does it mean? Well, faith is not something to be screwed up in an effort to believe by "sheer brain power". That may be credulity, auto-suggestion or self-effort, but it is not faith. Faith is much more knowing what God is going to do and yielding to it. It is a holding firm in God. It is looking all the facts in the face as Abraham did (Rom. 4:19-20) and yet believing that God who has spoken will perform. In Heb.11:7-19 Abraham recognised that his part was obedience. The resurrection of Isaac, if the situation came to that, would be God's problem not Abraham's. This is faith. It is the principle of a life that has yielded its will to the will of God.

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### 17:7-10

Spiritual service is full of pitfalls, one of the major ones being pride by which we become preoccupied with our own virtues, real and imagined. While we would never put it into words we are apt to feel a degree of self-satisfaction and even superiority, as if we were saying to God, "See what great things I have done for You." "This parable of master and slave is a warning against the book-keeping mentality, which thinks it can run up a credit balance with God. The slave's labour belongs to his master, and a full day's work is no more than his duty. There are no 'works of supererogation'. Nothing he can do constitutes a claim on his master's gratitude or puts his master in his debt. The demands of God are equally exacting: His servants can neither earn His approval nor put Him under an obligation. 'Unworthy servants' does not mean useless servants; even the best service is no more than God is entitled to expect, since it gives Him nothing that does not belong to Him by right. The whole idea of merit is to be abandoned in our approach to God." (Caird) We know, of course, that God does in fact reward His servants and deals with them in kindness surpassing all understanding. But these rewards are the gifts of grace, and the more closely we walk with God and the more we seek to serve Him, the more we will realise just how unworthy we are. That God should have us in His service at all is marvellous. That He should give us all the provision we need for the privilege of service and then give us love-gifts of blessing in reward for doing that service, is altogether a miracle of grace. Such thoughts should make us happy and keep us humble.

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### 17:11-19

When we ask for an increase of faith, what do we want it for? Is it to do great things for God? Why do we want to do great things? Could there not be a deep self-centred element in our request? The first work of faith is love, first to Christ and then to our brother, and love will never be slow to show its gratitude. This story shows both faith and love. The lepers, standing apart as unclean persons were required to do, appealed earnestly to Jesus, of whose power they had undoubtedly heard. Receiving the command to go and show themselves to the priest, who alone was able to certify their cleansing, they had to assume that they were in fact healed, although at that precise moment the marks of leprosy still showed on their bodies. The command of Christ was the operative word of healing and the actual miracle took place as they went in obedience to the command. It is at this point

that faith and love are manifested, the love authenticating the faith. One man, a despised Samaritan, turned back (possibly before reaching the priests) and, having recognised the spiritual significance of this Jesus whose word was with power, he poured out his heart in praise to God, and gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ by whom the saving power of God had touched his body and saved his soul. The other nine cured lepers, possibly true-blooded Jews, contented themselves with the strict requirement of their law and their consequent re-entry to the privileges and pleasures of Jewish society. The nine were content with the power detached from the person, but the one, by the response of love to Christ, sealed and ratified his transitory contact with the power and promise of God. In so doing the man committed himself to and united himself with Christ and found salvation, and not merely the healing of his body and the removal of social disability. The nine ungrateful men, having gained from God what they wanted, had no further interest in His Son, and they remain a testimony to that defective faith which, by experience, believes in miracles but does not bring salvation. "Faith" is not, faith if it fails to bring a person to a new relationship of loving response to God in Jesus Christ.

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### 17:20-21

We could do well today to read to the end of the chapter for the lessons of v.1-19 are now set against the background of the final end of all things and the coming of the kingdom of God in its glory. It is this eternal dimension that is so often absent from our thinking and we become time bounded and as materialistic as worldly unbelieving people. The result of this is that we lose our sense of urgency, we quench the thrill of victory and we no longer manifest an attitude of expectation. This being so, we tend to let our religion degenerate into speculative theory rather than assured fact. The question asked by the Pharisees seems a very spiritual one, but Jesus' answer reveals their spiritual blindness and insensitivity. Jesus' words do not simply mean that the knowledge of the kingdom is an inward experience, as it certainly is; but He says the kingdom is in the midst of you, amongst you, before your very eyes. He had already said that the kingdom had come near (10:11), and later He says that the Jews had failed to recognise the presence of the Kingdom in the person of the King, His word and His power (19:41-44). These were men waiting for something significant to happen and all the while it was actually happening and they did not see it. This is the tragedy of blind unbelief which, as Hebrews 3:12 declares, is not a static thing but a dynamic power which draws people further and further away from God. The trouble with the Pharisees was that they were so sure of their own spiritual integrity, and so obsessed with pointing out the religious and spiritual defects of others, that they created a smokescreen of perpetual criticism which prevented them seeing the glory of the work of God being done in their community before their eyes. The Pharisees were disillusioned, discontented men whose religion had gone sour on them. They have many descendants.

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### 17:20-21

It is clear from v.20 that the Jews lived in an attitude of expectation, as did the early Christians, believing that the coming of the Kingdom of God in its full glory was imminent. This is a right attitude, but it can all too easily become the arena for mere theoretical debate, with people exchanging opinions about visible, measurable, contemporary happenings. We must be clear what we mean by expecting and waiting for the Kingdom to come, and what we actually conceive as the nature of that Kingdom. Jesus makes it clear that it is not something to be measured in terms of excitement, commotion or size, nor is it something postponed to some future day. The presence of the kingdom operating in power now, and the final manifestation of the kingdom in power, glory, salvation and judgment, are both realities to be reckoned with. The word "visibly" or "observation"(AV) suggests watching with critical hostility or, in the medical use of the word, accurate observation of symptoms. Here it seems to denote the somewhat clinical and detached attitude of collating signs and thereby calculating the time of arrival of the kingdom. Those who take the position of neutral bystanders will never see the kingdom coming, but these are the very people who tend to pontificate and so to localise and limit that kingdom saying, "It is here," or "It is there." This tends to breed an attitude of restless speculation and distraction which ill accords with the attitude of spiritual alertness that Jesus calls for. The carnal mind focuses on the obvious and the exciting, but the mind of faith discerns in terms of the grain of mustard seed and the hidden leaven the true, genuine, present continuing work of the kingdom.

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### 17:20-21

Read to the end of the chapter and keep in mind that the Jews were so waiting for something significant to happen that they missed completely the significance of what was happening. This is a common error when men and women are enclosed in the straight-jacket of their own presuppositions. If we take the words, "The kingdom of God is *within* you," in the literal sense of the Greek, it means that the power of the kingdom is already operating within their circle because Jesus Christ is there. The power of that kingdom in its grace is seen in the emergence of faith, and in its judgment it is seen in the exposure and condemnation of unbelief (Luke 2:29-35). Since Christ has come the day of dealing with God can no longer be postponed, and God works in many unexpected places, even in the midst of the sect of the Pharisees. Some say Jesus is speaking here of the kingdom of God as being some inner spiritual condition, but this is not so. An inner condition of the soul may qualify for admission to the kingdom, but it is not itself the kingdom. "The kingdom of God is not here under discussion as a state of mind or a disposition in men. It is a fact of history, not of psychology. Moreover Jesus speaks elsewhere of men entering the kingdom, not of the kingdom entering men. The kingdom is a state of affairs, not a state of mind." (Manson) "He (Jesus) teaches that the kingdom of God is already a present reality in Him but that its final consummation lies in the future when He comes in divine majesty." (Geldenhuys) Having made this clear, Jesus goes on to teach, not the theorising Pharisees, but His own believing disciples.

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### 17:22-25

The phrase "one of the days" (22) of the Son of Man is a Hebraism for the "first day" of the breaking in on human experience of the King in all His glory. Jesus warns His men that the course of events while the kingdom moves on to its fulfilment will be marked by costly suffering (25) and unfulfilled longing (22), the latter being the product of the former. They will yearn for Christ's immediate coming but satisfaction will be denied them because the time has not yet come. Faith must wait God's appointed time, which is in His power and knowledge alone (Acts 1:6-8; Matt. 24:36). This waiting and working in faith is not easy, especially when evidences suggest that evil is on the increase, and the disciples must guard against being deceived by false prophets and by their own wishful or depressed thinking. When the battle is hard and the way long, the heart is vulnerable and the Devil will see to it that many voices are available to speak distractions (2 Pet. 3:1-18; Matt. 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Thess. 2:1-5). We need to keep our wits about us, our heads clear and our hearts warm, discerning the voices that tempt us and keeping ourselves under the balanced instruction of the truth of Scripture. When the fulness of the time comes, the kingdom and the King Himself will come with the swiftness, unpredictability and universality of a flash of lightning. In the twinkling of an eye He will be there and all shall see Him (Rev. 1:7-8). All that we mean by eternity will burst in on the world in fulness and glory, and eternal divisions will be made and finalised. The way to glory is the way of the Cross (25). There is no other way for Christ or for His disciples. Suffering and glory, preparedness and unexpectedness, hope realised and hope deferred are things to be held in tension, not contradiction.

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### 17:26-32

If the coming of Christ presents such challenge to men of faith what will it mean to a heedless generation (1 Pet. 4:7, 17-18)? With both Noah and Lot there was a time of tranquility in which men allowed themselves to become totally engrossed in daily pursuits to the point that they were indifferent and insensitive to the things of the soul and of eternity and of God until sudden disaster overtook them. We tend to think of the situation in Sodom as being the terrible one (although all the human activities mentioned by Jesus here are ordinary and legitimate ones) but there was no vital ministry in that decadent society. In Noah's generation there was a glorious ministry of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 11:7) lasting 120 years (Gen. 6:3) and backed up by the obedient life of a godly man, who showed by example the way of salvation when he went with his family into the ark of safety (wonderful illustration of Christ) which carried the people through the rising waters of judgment. In many ways the soul of Lot was anaesthetised by the life he had chosen to live and he had to be dragged out of the judgment about to fall. But Noah watched the indifference of men becoming more chronic

and the number of the saints decreasing. A whole generation became engrossed in the sheer business of living and God was not in their thoughts. Then the judgment came and they awakened to the danger too late. Note the emphasis on "them all" in v.27 and v.29. Indifference, carelessness and worldly preoccupation are dangerous diseases and can cost people everything.

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### 17:26-32

Concentrate on v.31-32 in order to bring home to our hearts the things that really matter to people. It is the house and the field, the domestic life and the business life that constitute the "god" of many lives. People say proudly that they just live for their families or their jobs, and others live for their hobbies and entertainments. In themselves, there is nothing wrong with these things, in their place. We do not counsel a life of puritanical inhibition and the evacuation of cultural interest in the name of Christ. But when the heart is captured by "things" and "people" the soul is stolen from God. Think of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) or the very practical comments of James (Jas. 4:13-5:5) or the sweeping incisiveness of John (1 John 2:15-17) or the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:19-21). people will take great risks to safeguard their interests in this world, to the point of endangering their lives. But what of their interest in the world to come? The significance of the story of Lot's wife (Gen. 19:15-26) is not that she happened to glance back over her shoulder but that, her heart being still in love with Sodom, she stopped in her journey to safety, and as she stood so near to Sodom looking with lingering longing on all that the place meant to her, she was overcome in the brimstone of judgment. She belonged to Sodom. She wanted it to be so, and she got her desire.

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### 17:33-37

Whoever tries to gain, purchase, hold on to, save, or make his life his own at the cost of neglecting eternal things will lose it both in time and eternity. Worldly-minded people become less and less complete as time runs out, and it is their defects and limitations rather than their accomplishments and fulfilment that are most manifest. But those who are prepared to lose, forfeit, surrender their lives now are the very people who find life and take possession of it, and of their own personalities. But this is not calculated; it is for Christ's sake, who one day with swift suddenness will appear in personal glory and whose presence will effect a radical and eternal separation which breaches the most intimate of relationships and activities. If the "taken" in v.34-36 indicates a taking to judgment, as some suggest and as v.37 seems to confirm, and the whole process is one of visible operation rather than secret snatching away, then no use can be made of these verses to terrorise sensitive people, children included, as has often been done by harsh evangelicals, even by parents. It is with tender solemnity that we must speak of even the sweetest of human ties being severed for ever, and the practical lesson is that we must see to it that our deepest relationships are *made in Christ* (2 Cor. 6:14) and *kept in Christ*. If the "taken" refers to the believers being taken to be with Christ to share His glory in blessedness (1 Thess. 4:13-18), then "being left" means to be without shelter on the day of judgment. The last verse is difficult. If the disciples are asking "where" they will be taken, the answer is "to be with Christ" (Philip. 1:23, but the reference to carcasses seems a strange way to describe this. If "where" is an enquiry as to the place of judgment then the illustration declares that wherever moral and spiritual decay are found there judgment will operate. Since this whole passage is addressed to disciples (22) we take the message to be one of reassurance as well as challenge. To know that evil is under the scrutiny, surveillance and judgment of the Lord of Glory is comfort indeed.

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### 18:1-8

Luke's narrative emphasises the progress of Jesus towards Jerusalem, a deliberate journey beginning in 9:51, reaching its final stage in 17:11, the last act in the drama beginning in 18:31 with the Triumphal entry. This background, linked with the emphasis on the coming of the kingdom (17:20ff) and the longing to see one of the days of God's power, leads on to this lesson on prayer which is addressed to the disciples. Jesus has told them of the longing for the kingdom which is not to be satisfied (17:22), and now He speaks about the need for prayer. This is the clear function of the parable (1) and its emphasis is on encouragement rather than on exhortation to importunate prayer. God is *contrasted* with the unjust judge and the assurance is given that He will swiftly



intervene to vindicate and deliver His people (8). But what will the circumstances be when this intervention comes (8)? Shall the Son of Man find *the* faith or persistent faith on the earth? Without question there will be the elect remnant, as there has always been, holding fast in God and living by His promises, waiting for God to fulfil His word as the old saints waited at the time of the Nativity. But Jesus has already described the worldly situation of godlessness (Luke 17:26-36 and Matt. 24:3-13, 21-22) in the crisis towards the end of the age. Now, within such circumstances, only prayer will keep the Lord's people from fainting and losing heart. After all, prayer is not a lever for extorting "blessings" from God. It is the essential urge of the life towards God, the setting of the mind and heart on things eternal, and the evaluating of the whole of life in relation to the will of God. In this light, the injunction to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17) is the most practical of all advice.

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### 18:1-8

To understand the parable keep in mind that God is being contrasted with the unjust judge, not likened to him. The woman had no weapon except her persistence and the judge was swayed neither by religious principle nor public opinion.

But if persistence prevails with one who is activated only by an interest in his own peace and comfort, how much more will it prevail with One who has compassion on His elect? But we must not allow ourselves to think of God as being either unwilling to bless (so that He has to be belaboured with prayer requests) or slow to bless (so that there is danger of His being too late). The word "quickly" is very important for it indicates the immediacy of God's interest and intervention on behalf of those on whom He has set His love. The words "his chosen ones" signify people known by and precious to God, in contrast to the widow who was in the eyes of the unjust judge an unknown person of considerable nuisance value. We would all pray much more if we reminded ourselves of how valuable we are to God. Granted God bears long with His people, delaying His intervention yet listening patiently, but this is no denial of prayer. Indeed, it is when we learn "the patience of unanswered prayer" and continue to pray with the persistence of faith, regardless of the circumstances which scream at us to doubt God, that we grow in grace and begin to have a powerful witness to all who are around us. The words "chosen ones" signify the privilege of being chosen to serve and to suffer for Christ's sake (Philip. 1:29). This is indeed privilege!

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### 18:9-14

Prayer is a dangerous occupation especially when exercised in company with others. We are always apt to forget just whom we are addressing and can easily become preoccupied with people's evaluation of our prayers rather than God's. The purpose of this parable is made clear in the first verse. The story tells of two men, why they went to church, with what attitude they went, and how they returned home. For one it was an exercise in godliness and an experience of salvation, but for the other it was totally negative as far as communion with God was concerned and spiritually destructive as far as the man himself was concerned. Note that v.10 tells us that both men went with the intention of praying, but only one man actually prayed, the other simply spoke to himself. What is more, it was the man with spiritual instruction and privilege and experience who wasted God's time and his own. The Pharisee had no petitions to present, for he had no need of anything and no sense of his own insufficiency. He praised himself before God, gave a list of his negative virtues and his minor pieties, compared himself very favourably with the tax collector who was so obviously neither spiritual nor orthodox, and more or less congratulated God on having such a fine fellow as himself to serve Him. This man did not come to church to meet with God for he was so self-centred that he was his own God. He left church as he had come to it, without God. He was a man totally irrelevant to the work of God's kingdom and the tragedy was that he counted himself one of the "pillars of the kirk". Here is a man who knew so much in theory but in practice was so little in spiritual reality. Lord, is it I?

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### 18:9-14

In considering the tax gatherer take time to read such passages as Rom. 2:1, 13, 17-25; 3:19-24; 7:18; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15; Rev. 3:17-18. The tax gatherer did not need to have it rubbed in that he was a sinner. The very fact that this despised outcast was in church at all was a token of something moving his heart. Perhaps the parable

suggests that he was known to be corrupt, an extortioner, unjust and an adulterer. Perhaps he was a sinner who had grown weary and sick of his sin, or perhaps by God's spirit he had been convicted of his sin through hearing of the love and of the judgment of God. Perhaps it was some long ago influence in his life, that of a godly mother perhaps, which now quickened into the kind of conviction that leads to repentance. In church he was like a fish out of water, and no doubt he was aware of the sidelong glances of the Pharisee. But he was a seeking soul, hungry for God and for forgiveness and for the life that he had not found in his worldly materialism and sin. He came as he was with nothing to plead but the mercy of God. He did not seek improvement but salvation. God met him there and then and he went home a forgiven and justified sinner. All he had been and had done, all he was by nature, his sin, his need, his guilt and bondage - all were met in God's total mercy. "Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot; to Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come." (C Elliot) Whoever comes like that will not be turned away.

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### **18:15-17**

This is no place for consideration of the doctrine and practice of infant baptism, not least because the passage is not dealing with that theme but with the condition for entry into God's kingdom. Among other things this story is a "rebuke to that adult complacency which regards children as incomplete adults, as yet beneath the notice of God ... and assumes that the world exists for those who have reached 'years of discretion'." (Caird) It is clear that Jesus' act of touching the infants (Luke uses this word rather than Mark's more general one translated 'children') was understood by the Jews as being a benediction, that is, an act which carried with it spiritual significance in relation to God. The accounts given in Matt. 19:13ff. and Mark 10:13ff. both declare that it was following on Jesus' teaching on divorce that the parents brought their children to be blessed, and it is following the incident with the children that the rich young ruler came to Jesus. It is Mark who tells us that Jesus was displeased and moved with indignation because of the harsh attitude of his disciples in respect of the children. It is a terrible pride that assumes that we only, because of our age and understanding, are able to enter into the full significance of the spiritual purposes of salvation. Jesus says that it is the childlike spirit that enables a person, young or old, to enter the kingdom of God. What is childlikeness? It is certainly not childishness, with its petulance, its desire for gratification and its rebellion against discipline. It is more that artless, non-selfconscious simplicity of spirit with which a child is able to accept without doubt or embarrassment what is offered, without any sense of having to earn or repay. It is this that leads on to the story of the rich ruler.

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### **18:18-23**

This ruler was young, rich and a very attractive personality (Matt. 19:20; Mark 10:21), very earnest about religion and eternal life but at the same time very blind. In referring to Jesus as "Good teacher" he used an almost unheard of form of address and Jesus challenged him about this, asking if it was just a flattering title or if it was in fact a confession of faith, recognising the person of Jesus and acknowledging Him to be the Son of God. But he approached Jesus on a man to man basis with no recognition of the uniqueness of the Saviour, and no awareness of his own limitation, failure and need. The blight on this man's life was that even in relation to God he wanted nothing he could not earn. When he asked, "What must *I do*?" Jesus could only take him at his own level and refer him to the Commandments, emphasising the manward commandments and not the Godward ones. The ruler had awarded himself a clear honours pass-mark with regard to these demands and had no thought that God might see failure in him. But at the same time the man's whole attitude signified that he found neither peace nor assurance in his religion. In this the young man was very like Paul who also claimed to have fulfilled the Law (Phil. 3: 3-9) but who found eternal life only when he met Christ. The one thing keeping the ruler from eternal life was his "self", which was his real God, because that mattered to him more than anything else. He was, and wanted to be, a self-made man. Jesus told him to let go of all he was, and had; to be prepared to become nothing and to follow Christ; and in this way, trusting utterly in God's mercy, he would find eternal life. This was the crunch. The man's face told all (23) as the battle was fought between self and Christ. Christ lost.

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### 18:24-25

The young ruler wanted to graduate into God's kingdom, not to surrender, and his sincerity and earnestness were exposed as being defective. In Luke's account Jesus makes no mention of the commandment about coveting and this could suggest that the man was so well off he had no need to covet anything anyone had. But today's verses indicate that this covetous principle of achievement and acquisition lay very much at the heart of his life. It was this present life that really mattered to him and eternal life was secondary. When the choice came it was the "riches" of life that took priority. Where your treasure is your heart is also (Matt. 6:19-21), and there sooner or later your feet will follow and that will be your life. This principle operated in the young ruler and Jesus was filled with sorrow as He saw him going away but He made no attempt to stop him. It would have been fruitless. Far from lowering the standard, Jesus turned to His disciples and spoke to them in extreme terms of things that are impossible. In Mark 10:24 the A.V. has the phrase "them that trust in riches" but the modern translations omit this. With what difficulty shall they that have riches enter the kingdom. The "riches" include money, possessions, position, career, talent, family, relationships: none of them wrong in themselves, but all capable of coming between a man and God. How easy it is to lose your soul, and how gently the Devil seduces us away from Christ. We waken up too late, to discover a great, un-crossable gulf between us and the Saviour.

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### 18:26-30

Here is the disciples' reaction to the incident with the ruler and to Jesus' "hard saying" (24-25). The Jews tended to think that riches were a sign of God's special favour. If the rich had so little chance of being saved what hope was there for the poor? But many of those who have "got on" in life have done so simply because they have given themselves to the business of success and prosperity, not necessarily using false or evil means to do so. Only the grace of God can break the spell that "riches" cast on a man's heart, but like-wise only that same grace can keep a man from being proud and superior because of his sense of poverty. Peter, typically selfconscious, drew attention to the sacrifice made by the disciples in giving up all to follow Christ in a way that the ruler was not prepared to do. But such temptation to spiritual pride must be nipped in the bud, and Jesus declared that no one will ever in fact be the poorer for following Christ even in this present world. When that is reckoned on, together with the reward of eternal life with all its gracious benefits, the thought of sacrifice seems to fade considerably. Paul is very clear about this in 2 Cor. 4:16-18. The way of the Cross undoubtedly narrows down life, but at the same time you find the whole of life enlarging in rich experience, together with tribulations (Mk. 10:28-31). Many have found their first real experience of being part of a family and a home when they became part of a Christian fellowship, sharing in all the rigours and battles. This is life indeed.

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### 18:31-34

From here to Chap. 21:38 we have the story of Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem and His final teaching in the city. Everything now moves towards the Cross and we must sense the human apprehension Jesus felt as well as the glorious dignity and assurance He showed as He proceeded towards the moment of His triumphant death. Today's verses give the fourth announcement of Jesus' death (9:22, 44; 13:33) and always the emphasis is on the divine necessity. The Son of Man *must* suffer and the lamb slain from the foundation of the world, foreshadowed and foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures, *must* die on the scene of world history to make full and perfect atonement for the sins of men. Paul, in 1 Cor. 15:1-4, makes it very clear that the death of Jesus can be understood *only* in accordance with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Note carefully also that these prophecies of death always speak of the resurrection as the final climax of the work of the Cross. The death would not be as a victim but as a conqueror, and Jesus' words in v.31 indicated to the disciples that the time had now come to move forward to this glorious moment. The amazing thing is the total blindness and lack of understanding manifest in these men who had known such fellowship with, and teaching from, their Master. It was only afterwards that they remembered the words spoken here (John 12:16) and this is a comfort to us in our sluggish understanding, for we find these same men heralding a gospel of tremendous assurance in Acts 2: 22-24, 32-36; 3:13-26. But humanly speaking Jesus must have been a disappointed teacher for right to the end these favoured men remained blind and uncomprehending (Luke 24:13-32).

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### 18:31-34

This lack of understanding on the part of the disciples is so important that we must study it. Why had these men, taught so well and sharing so fully in Jesus' mighty works, such earthly thoughts of their Messiah? They thought they were the spiritually minded ones and yet they were almost totally conditioned by their past, their colleagues, and their own pet theories and presuppositions, so that the "new" teaching the Son of God was giving them just did not register. Why can people be taught so much and yet learn so little? The explanation could be a wrong attitude to the Scriptures or, more likely, an attitude of unbelief in receiving the Scriptures (Heb. 4:1-2). It could well be an awareness that the word of God, if it is received, is liable to interfere with life, and therefore people find it hard to understand. There are none so blind as those who do not want to see! Most probably it was simply a case of Jesus' men being so taken up with themselves that they lost the place, not seeing, not sensing or appreciating the significance of what was going on in their midst nor giving themselves to it in preparation for what was yet to come. This is how disciples become a burden and a heartbreak! If we read, for example, Mk.9:30-34;10:32-37,41-45, we begin to see the deep-rooted spiritual pride in these significant men which necessitated their being stripped of all self-deception by the exposure of their miserable cowardice when they all ran away at the Cross. Peter, the most dogged and wilful of them all, had the most public exposure. The world knew and the church knew that he had denied his Lord and he could face no-one until Jesus restored him after the resurrection. It is pride that blinds and makes us unteachable.

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### 18:35-43

Matt. 20:29-34 and Mk. 10:46-52 together with Luke's account make it difficult to decide whether there were two beggars or one cured before reaching Jericho, in the city, or leaving it. Since the Gospel writers are selective in their approach and their "story" is an "exposition" of Jesus rather than a strict account of His every action we do not need to be concerned about such seeming contradictions. Think of the variety of details when several newspapers report the same incident. Jesus and His disciples were mingling with the crowd of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, and the hubbub of noise was broken into by the beggar's cry, addressing Jesus as Son of David. This is a Messianic title and can scarcely represent only the beggar's private conviction. It appears that there was a widespread popular belief that this man was in fact the promised king from the house of David. This confession of Bartimaeus later found fuller expression at the triumphal entry to Jerusalem (19:36-40). It may well have been that the insistence of the blind beggar and his determination to do business with Christ were the catalyst that brought into evidence the situation of crisis when Jesus approached Jerusalem. Granted, Jesus' triumphal entry was a deliberate act on His part, as we shall see, but the beggar's faith and determination certainly served to focus the vague thinking of many in that uncomprehending but excitable crowd. Sadly, it made little impression on the disciples, and Jesus was aware of that.

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### 18:35-43

Central to the story is the beggar's persistence, which earned him the rebuke of the people, particularly the disciples, who were usually over concerned to look after Jesus. In some ways these disciples thought of their Master as their "property" and they expected people to defer to Him. The crowd thought of Jesus as a figure full of interest, arousing speculation. But to the blind beggar He was much more. He had heard of Jesus, and faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:8-17). Granted saving faith is a work of God's grace (Eph. 2:4-9) but there is no automatic operation which dispenses with the urgent need for man to claim Christ when He draws near. Jesus was passing by, never to walk that road again, and for Bartimaeus it was now or never. His persistence was an indication of faith, and Jesus stopped, not least to bring that incipient faith to full, articulate expression. That there was more than just a healing miracle is confirmed by the closing verses which tell of a man "discipled" to Jesus. Faith awakened had sought with urgency and was confirmed. It is like this in a congregation. To many it is all a matter of sermons, long or short, interesting, well spoken, well illustrated or just dull. Then miraculously it is to one individual the word of God unto life, and faith claims the gift. If this could happen in Jericho, a busy, fashionable, wicked city (Lk. 10:30), which was in fact under God's curse (Joshua 6:26), then it can happen anywhere, and it does!

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### 19:1-10

Jericho was full of ardent Jewish pilgrims and national feeling was running high, which made things dangerous for a man like Zacchaeus, prominent among the tax gatherers, who were in the pay of the hated Roman authorities. It must have been more than curiosity that prompted him to be anywhere near this popular figure. Like Bartimaeus he had heard of Jesus whose words and works were with power from God and who had the reputation of being a friend to sinners. Possibly he was not quite sure what drew him to Jesus but reports of what had been done for others had certainly awakened in his Jewish heart long-forgotten desires and impulses. As he then lived he was not true to himself, his heritage nor the religion from which he had backslidden. He was a lonely man, hungry for friendship and perhaps longing for power to overcome his weakness, to break with his failure and compromise, to change his life and become a true man able to walk with his head held high. We are not making excuses for Zacchaeus but simply reminding ourselves how easy it is to condemn a person without knowing either the battles being fought or the hopes beginning to kindle. A man's first response to the grace of God may not have any religious appearance but there is simply no limit to what may happen in a man awakened to the possibilities of life open to him in Jesus Christ. There is an eternity of grace revealed in the fact that Jesus saw him, and expressed in the statement in v.10. Can we imagine the seeking eyes of the Saviour scanning the crowd and seeing not hopeless cases, nor cases deserving of judgment, criticism and rebuke, but lost men and women whom He had come to seek and to save. If we had more of this kind of spirit we would be better evangelists.

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### 19:1-10

Zacchaeus had never been attracted to the religion of the Pharisees for it was heartless as well as lifeless. But in Jesus this little, lonely man sensed the presence of the forgiving grace of God, and this alone was enough to make him risk the anger of the crowd and expose himself to their ridicule by throwing caution to the wind and climbing a tree. Imagine the wave of self-consciousness sweeping over the man as Jesus, and the crowd, stopped right under his undignified perch. No doubt they waited for a laugh as Jesus dealt with this "traitor", but there was no public censure, no exposure of miserable and mighty sin (had he made his riches by stretching the law to suit his own convenience?) and no challenge to discipleship, as in the case of the rich young ruler. Zacchaeus was sick of his riches for they robbed him of both love and life, which were his real desires. Now imagine the little man's face as Jesus spoke the words of v.5, His eyes twinkling and His heart opening in expansive love. Zacchaeus got the message. Jesus wanted him, just as he was, and he wanted Jesus. Could there have been a more glorious conversion? Go to your hymn book and read the prayer beginning, "Just as I am, without one plea ..... Just as I am, and waiting not ..... Just as I am, I come." (C. Elliott)

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### 19:1-10

The Jews were shocked by Jesus going to the tax gatherer's house because they had fixed ideas as to who was acceptable to God and who was not. Unfortunately for them God thought differently! Meeting Jesus and responding to His grace had worked a revolution in the little man and publicly, with deep spontaneity, he made clear he had begun a new life. The giving away of half his fortune and the restitution plus compensation promised to all he had defrauded were the evidence of the new nature that was now his in Christ. Here is a man who, having been converted, was determined to break with the past and to do so (in terms of restitution) far beyond the strict letter of requirement (Lev. 6:5; Num. 5:7; Ex. 22:1, 4, 7). How different that is from the miserable quibbling about what we should or should not give up for Jesus' sake. In spite of all Zacchaeus had been and had done, his faith in Christ now marked him out as a true son of Abraham (Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:6-9), just as the unbelief of the Jews marked them out as having no real part in God. What transformation of life is indicated in Jesus' words declaring that salvation had indeed come not only to Zacchaeus but also to his family. Many refuse to see this because the family (especially if there were children) had not themselves made a "decision" for Christ. But Christ had not waited; He had invaded the family of this lost sinner and, the bridgehead of grace having been established, the family were claimed for Christ (Lk. 10:5; John 4:53; Acts 10:1-48; 16:34; 1 Cor. 7:12-16). Try to imagine the change in this man's home now that Christ was in it.

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## 19:11-27

With the words of v.10 ringing in their ears, Jesus went on to teach by this parable those who thought that the Kingdom would appear suddenly and soon in a glorious climax. We have here a corrective to wrong thoughts about the Kingdom. Perhaps the conversion of Zacchaeus, a high-ranking civil servant, was seen by the people as a blow against the secular rule of Rome and as a token of what was going to happen on a greater scale when Jesus reached Jerusalem. "They", of course, would be part of the triumph. Their thoughts were all of revolution, success and the throwing off of an unpleasant yoke; whereas Jesus' thoughts of the coming of the kingdom concerned suffering, rejection and death. We must never forget that "Jesus won the world through shame, and beckons thee His road" (F.W.Faber). This should modify many of our impulsive and ill-thought-out actions and attitudes! What should give us assurance and poise is our conviction, based on Jesus' own words, that the Kingdom is in fact present in power now (Lk. 17:21; 22:12, 69; John 18:36; cf. John 6:15). This should be even more clear to us than to the disciples because the Cross and Resurrection are accomplished facts, but even we must learn to hold the present and future in dynamic tension. In Heb. 1:3; 2:8-9 and Rom. 8:24 (set between 8:18 and 35-39) we have this made so clear. We are saved, a glorious reality, and we are saved *in hope*, which hope is our anchor, sure and steadfast. If we can grasp this we shall be kept from many false expectations, with all their demoralising impact, and the main marks of our lives will be balance and dynamic together with an attendant peace which passes all understanding.

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## 19:11-27

There are five groups in this story: the king, the faithful, the less faithful, the useless and the enemies. The Jews listening would understand the parable very vividly because of contemporary events. Archelaus, son of Herod, after his father's death went to Rome to receive and to be confirmed in the sovereignty of his father's kingdom. Only the Roman emperor could give this confirmation and once the deed was done it would not be reversed. The Jews sent a deputation to Rome to dispute the claim of this man (14) but the appointment was made and Archelaus returned to rule. This undoubtedly must have put the rebels on the spot as they were answerable to the king for their actions while he was absent in Rome. Now think of the parable in this light. The Kingdom can be bestowed only by the One who has the power to give it, that is, God the Father Almighty. Jesus here manifests again that wonderful submission of the Son to the Father which we tend to forget (Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Acts 2:32-36; Rev. 11:15-17) and which issued in the enthronement of the Son in exaltation, having finished the work He was given to do (Heb. 1:1-3). But integral to the thought of going to receive the Kingdom is the clear intention of returning again (Acts 1:6-11), although there will be considerable delay before this takes place. This does not eliminate the fact that when the King does return it will be a swift and sudden return, taking people unawares because they have become preoccupied with their own worldly business. It is in the absence of the King that people are put to the test by their own actions.

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## 19:11-27

Matt. 25:14-30 gives a similar parable but the emphasis there is on each servant being given according to ability, whereas in Luke each is given the same amount. The servants are given equal opportunity and told to trade, in the Master's interest, until he returns. The citizens, men of the world, hate him without a cause and show an intensity and absoluteness of rejection which nothing will change. This is something we must face up to and it brings into focus "the wrath of the Lamb" (v.27; cf. Rev. 6:12-17; 9:20-21; 16:5-11). The intensity of enmity does not hinder, let alone prevent, the King's return in power and glory, but it does expose peoples hearts. The exposure that comes with the King's return involves His own servants as well as His enemies and this we must consider. Note first that the servants, who acknowledged their master's right to rule and to ask for service, were left to get on with the Master's business in His absence. There was no visible check or restraint on the servants and if they so chose they could live to themselves (Matt. 21:33-41), no doubt intending to put things right before their lord returned (Lk. 12:45-46). If it was only duty that kept them at their work their zeal would soon grow cold. But if a man loves his master it makes no difference whether he is present or absent. Read 2 Cor. 5:5-10; Heb. 11:24-27 and contrast Phil.3:18-21.

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### 19:11-27

Consider the servants who were provided for and entrusted with the safekeeping and progress of the master's business. It is required of such stewards that they should be faithful (1 Cor. 4:1.-2), and that responsibility is not discharged simply by preserving intact the treasure that has been entrusted. It has to be used in the master's business and an account has to be given. The first servant, with wonderful lack of self consciousness, reported that *his master's* money had proved richly fruitful. He had used the opportunity to the full, and the Lord, recognising faithfulness in little things (17) to be the true token of integrity and worth, was pleased, commended the man, and rewarded him with further service and responsibility in the administration of the kingdom. The second servant was also trustworthy and he too was rewarded appropriately. We need not emphasise the absence of commendation (19), although it is suggested that this man made only part use of what was entrusted to him. We must be careful here because there is the danger of falling into the error of comparing ourselves with others and expecting exactly the same from each person, making no allowance for difference in capacity (Rom. 14:1-13; 2 Cor. 8:12; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 18-22). It is cruel to expect from people what they are basically incapable of giving and we have no right to lay down the law nor to sit in judgment. It is the Lord who looks on the heart and it is to Him we give account.

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### 19:11-27

For obvious reasons we have taken time to study this parable in detail and there is a deep lesson in the story of the idle servant. He is the only one who said the master was austere and demanding, and we understand this for it is usually those who hold back who say most about the cost of following Christ, while those who press on play down or rejoice in their sufferings (2 Cor. 4:8-12, 16-18; Acts 5:40-42). There was something wrong with this man's attitude to his master. Certainly there seems to have been no love on the part of this servant, even though he had been entrusted with service just like the others. Perhaps he had a chip on his shoulder, feeling that he had not been given his rightful place among the master's men. As a result, during the master's absence, he doggedly refused to take his rightful share in the work, perhaps despising and criticising his fellows who may well have exhorted him to stir himself (Heb. 10:24; 12:12-13). There is no explaining such people other than in terms of an evil heart of unbelief departing from God. (Heb. 3:12-15) When people are keeping themselves from God they also keep themselves to themselves, frustrating both fellowship and service, often justifying their actions by claiming they are hurting no-one but themselves. This is not so, as the parable makes plain. The master's work suffered loss, the fellowship was deprived of the contribution the faithless servant could have given, and, of course, the man himself suffered grievous loss which seems to have been irremediable (1 Cor. 3:11-15). To him who makes use of what he has more shall be given for even more fruitful service. But the man who declines to be fruitful will find the Lord takes away from him what he has; capacity declines as willingness degenerates, and eventually the capacity is taken away. This is solemn.

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### 19:28-40

Throughout all His public ministry Jesus had been moving inexorably to this point and we read of His striding on ahead of His disciples, "eager for death" as one commentary puts it. *His* hour had come and we see just how completely the initiative lay with Jesus. In John's record of the Gospel we have many emphases on the thought of the complete ordering of time (John 7:30; 8:20), but Luke also was aware of this although he did not express it so explicitly (4:29-30; 22:14, 53). If we can grasp this we shall see more and more that the Cross was no accident and certainly no triumph of the powers of evil. Indeed we can imagine the powers of hell, human and spirit, being roused to battle-stations by the sight of the triumphal entry of Christ to Jerusalem, and of course they tried to stop it (39-40). But why at this point did Jesus make such an astonishing public demonstration after maintaining such a principle of quietness and almost secrecy throughout His ministry? With Jerusalem crowded with pilgrims and feelings running high this undoubtedly forced the Pharisees into action. It is suggested that this was the first of three symbolic acts each relating to the Messiah: the entry, the cleansing of the temple and the last supper. At such a time of spiritual pilgrimage the Jews would be aware of Zech. 9:9-16, and now they saw it acted out before their eyes. Here was the king claiming his kingdom and presenting himself for coronation. It was a kingdom in which the world power of Rome was quite insignificant and the ecclesiastical

powers of the Pharisees irrelevant. The crowd may have sensed the spiritual significance but they did not understand it. Their thoughts were still of easy and immediate victory, but peace with heaven is not made without cost (Col. 1:20). The King comes to die.

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### 19:28-40

Consider the passage as it reveals the person and character of our Lord. The hymn, "Ride on, ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die," (H.H.Milman) expresses it all gloriously. Zechariah's prophecy was of a lowly prince of peace and it is royalty and humility that we see here. The colt was borrowed and the owner may well have been a disciple. There is no indication that Jesus had made prior arrangement to have the animal (why make it an unbroken one?) and the suggestion that the words "The Lord needs it" was a prearranged password seems an extremely artificial way of eliminating any miraculous element from the story. It certainly remains a total miracle that Jesus was able to mount this unbroken beast and ride him without trouble through a long procession of shouting voices and waving palm branches. It was a silent king who presented Himself. He did not wave, smile or exhort, for His holy loving heart yearned within Him for these people, many of whom from outlying districts owed Him much, and many others from the city who hated Him even to death. Were there any who understood by faith what was being enacted before their eyes? The Pharisees thought it all too extreme and protested, but Jesus' answer signified that this was a crucial moment for the whole order of creation. Think of Rom. 8:18-22; Psalm 19:1-6; 65:5-13; 98:8-9; Isaiah 55:12-13. But soon, the heap of stones in the ruins of Jerusalem would also cry out that the Jews had refused their King. Rejection of Christ is something that cannot be hidden.

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### 19:41-44

Here is the confirmation of the closing words of yesterday's reading. In the presence of the sin that shuts the heart against the grace and love of God, the great King of glory wept. It is a strong word and means literally that He sobbed as if to break His heart. This is what it costs a God of eternal love to be a God of eternal judgment. When the King comes to offer Himself and when the Prince of glory dies only to be refused, there is a penalty that must be paid. Jesus foresaw the grim ruin of the city and the people He had sought to save and who had missed the day of their visitation. Right at the beginning of his gospel Luke declared that God had visited and redeemed His people (1:68-69) and that His salvation had been seen (2:30-32). All through the story we have read of Jesus coming to Jerusalem and to the Jews, and all along we have seen the persistence and consistency of their rejection of Him. They failed to recognise God's moment when it came to them, because they did not want to recognise it. They refused every word of testimony and every evidence of mighty work and now it was too late for repentance. The visitation of the Saviour had become the visitation of the Judge. Nearly forty years were to pass in which the Jews continued their hellish persecution of the Christian Gospel, but in A.D. 70, by the political power and military might of Rome, Jerusalem was destroyed. Read Luke 13:34 (RSV) "..... I would ..... you would not". This is tragedy!

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### 19:45-48

What a contrast to the previous verses, but there is no contradiction, for love is tender but never weak. Here is the kingly Jesus, stern, manly, eyes ablaze and heart kindled with holy indignation, cleansing the House of God of all the dirty traffic established and maintained by a system of religion that spat in the face of God. Under the control of the leaders and rulers of the temple there was a monopoly governing the sale of animals for sacrifice and the business of money-changing which made available to pilgrims the "temple shekel". If the priests said the animal being sold by them was clean, then it was acceptable for sacrifice regardless of its actual condition. You can imagine the prices charged and the profits made in this and in the "fees" for money changing. Of course it was all done as a "service" to the worshippers, and the priests gathered the "reward" of "spiritual" service. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus cleansed the Temple of merchants and thieves (John 2:13-17), and then departed to exercise His ministry, largely in Galilee. Now, at the peak moment of pilgrimage, when His every action would be public and significant, He returned as Lord of the House to cleanse it of mockery and



to reinstate it to its rightful function as a place of prayer and for the teaching of God's Law. He cast out those who were deliberate in their refusal of His kingship, and in the presence of His enemies He taught the truth of God while religious hypocrites plotted His death. Read Malachi 1:6-13; 3:1-3.

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### **19:45-48**

From chapter 19:28 onwards we are dealing with the last stage of Jesus' life and work, and we have emphasised how clearly the initiative was with Jesus and not with His enemies. Some suggest there were in fact three entries to Jerusalem, each with a significance of its own, and this is based on Mark 11:11-12, 15, 19-20, 27. First Christ came as the King, presenting Himself, claiming His Kingdom and refusing to rebuke the crowds. Then He left the city for the night. The next day Christ came as Priest and entering the Temple with authority He cleansed it of all defilement. Again He departed. The third day Christ came as Prophet, making the Temple what it should be, a place where people could be taught the living Word of God. There was a deliberation about the whole process and we see Jesus engaging His enemies in battle and compelling them in every movement towards the Cross. This He did not on a basis of personal animosity but as God's appointed Messiah whose work had to be done for the salvation of the world. This was warfare with principalities and powers, and Jesus drove the Pharisees to the point of no return until the Cross was inevitable. In Luke 19:47 - 20:19 we have the first battle of words between Jesus and His enemies. This is followed by three further clashes of words which take us to 20:44, and then very swiftly on to the arrest.

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### **19:45-48**

There is still a lesson to be learned from these verses linked with John 2:13-17 and Matt. 23:13, 15, 25 and Matt. 21:43. Although the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of our Lord's ministry had been effective at the time, the Temple had by now reverted not only to what it had been (a house of merchandise) but to even worse (a den of thieves). The two things for which there was neither room nor desire were prayer and a welcome for the outsider (the Gentiles). The House of God had been made the tool or instrument of the carnal will of these spiritually degenerate men, and this always results in a rot attacking the spiritual institution, bringing it to judgment and at the same time bringing a paralysis of the outgoing power of God. But even more, from the reference in Matt. 23:15, we see that the spiritual effect of men who are wrong in themselves in relation to Christ is that by influence, practice and teaching they inoculate the minds and spirits of others against the real thing. This constitutes a tremendous challenge (2 Cor. 2:14-17) in terms of witness and service.

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### **20:1-8**

Reading in from the end of the previous chapter we see that cleansing is but the negative aspect of restoring the House of God to its place and function in the economy of God, the positive aspect being the teaching of the Law of God. The Pharisees hated the fact that in the ministry of Jesus authority was transferred from themselves to God's word, revealing as it did so that they had in fact no real spiritual power operating in their lives or religion (Matt. 7:28-29; Mark 1:21-22). This led to the question about authority and Jesus' counter-question which, if the Jews answered it, would give the answer to their own. If Jesus claimed the kingly authority of Messiah He could be incriminated with Rome, and if He declined to claim it He would be discredited with the people. But Hell is never too clever for Heaven and Jesus simply said, "My authority is the same as John's. What do you think of Him?" The poor Pharisees could only answer, "We have not come to any conclusion." Imagine the crowd's reaction to such evasion! The first round went to Jesus! It was as if He had said that if men do not recognise heavenly authority when they met it and saw it before their eyes, then argument would not convince them (John 7:14-21, 24-32, 40-52; Luke 7:19-23).

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### **20:9-18**

"In occupied territory like Palestine there were many large estates owned by foreigners, who leased them out to tenants for a proportion of the annual produce. Economic depression combined with nationalist unrest may well

## George Philip Bible Reading In Luke

have tempted farmers to withhold rent from an absentee landlord, even if they had to resort to violence, and in the end, to murder. If through the death of the heir the estate should be declared 'ownerless property', the actual occupants would have first claim to the possession of it ..... Any Jew, hearing this story, would be reminded of Isaiah's parable of the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7), in which the vineyard represented Israel. It was, therefore, inevitable that the Jewish authorities should recognise that he had told this parable against them." (Caird) The application of the parable is clear. God is the landlord, the prophets are the servants, the son is Jesus, the tenants are the Jewish leaders and the "others" are the Gentile people. The comment in v.16, "God forbid" (RSV) may be the reaction of offended pride saying, "It won't come to that." The Jews could never grasp the possibility of the eclipse of themselves and another people becoming God's 'chosen' for service. They forgot that killing the son still left the Father to be reckoned with! The parable sweeps through Jewish history like Acts 7:51-54. Here are men greatly privileged by being made servants of God mistaking themselves for masters to such an extent that when the master came they murdered him. It is always a great temptation.

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### 20:19-20

This short reading is significant. The Jews had tried to call Jesus to account for His work in the Temple and had failed (20:1ff). Then Jesus uttered this grave and very pointed warning (20:9-18), spoken in public for all to hear (20:9). At this point we are told in Mark 12:12 that the Jewish leaders slunk away defeated, but having no intention of leaving it at that. They would be back either in frontal assault or by some devious route to resume the battle. This reminds us of the technique of the Devil spoken of in Luke 4:13, where the AV. says "for a season,", the R.S.V. says, "Until an opportune time," J.B.P. says, "Until his next opportunity, and the N.E.B. says, "The devil departed, biding his time." When will we learn in spiritual service to set a guard against the enemy? Read the booklet "Kingdom against Kingdom" (G.M.Philip) and come to grips with Eph. 6:12ff; 2 Cor. 11: 13-15; Phil. 3:1-3, 17-19. Think of all we have been taught of Satan's attacks through friends, such as Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:21-23), or through physical and mental exhaustion, as Elijah found (1 Kings 19:4ff), or through prejudice as in the case of Jonah (Jonah 1:3; 4:1-3). How hellish it is to read of spies or agents passing themselves off as just and honest men. Remember they were very religious, but so is the Devil when it suits him.

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### 20:21-26

Jesus was involved here in a battle of arguments with the Jewish leaders who could not ignore His presence after the publicity of the triumphal entry. The argument about authority (20:1-8) was sparked off by the cleansing of the temple, and followed by the argument about responsibility to God (20:9-18). Now comes the argument about Caesar which begins with an effusion of flattery spoken by a deputation of Pharisees and Herodians (Mark 12:13-15). Undoubtedly it was rabid and proud nationalism that brought Pharisee and Herodian together and not loyalty to God. Certainly their motivation was a hellish spirit of antichrist, which presented itself in today's passage as an earnest loyalty to God. The trap was obvious. If Jesus gave a negative answer to the question (22) a charge of treason against Rome would follow, and if He gave a positive answer His critics would denounce Him to the people as a collaborator with Rome. Jesus' answer reveals that He was not concerned with scoring debating points but with the exposure of all that is false in religion, and at the same time with the enunciation of a deeply basic principle with regard to the relationship of church and state. The key to the passage is in the two words used, "pay" (22) and "give" (25). The first word refers to the handing over of an imposition (which may well be resented and refused), but the second refers to the paying back of a rightful debt (which must be done with gratitude, not duty). To distinguish the two needs straight thinking, not emotional reaction or prejudice.

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### 20:21-26

In the process of dealing with spiritual hypocrisy Jesus makes here an important statement with regard to the State and the principle governing the Christian's attitude to human institutions. Some Christians stand aloof from responsibility, for example refusing to vote in either local or national elections (saying possibly that the

candidate is not a believer and that it is wrong to be yoked with unbelievers). But these same people take full advantage of their "rights" in terms of tax and family allowances, education and health services. Jesus asked for a silver denarius (24), bearing the image of the Roman emperor, even though there were bronze coins with no such image in circulation to satisfy the scruples of the Jews. Without hesitation the coin was produced, as Jesus knew it would be, since He had seen them on the money changers' tables in the temple. By using these coins the Jews consented to Caesar's rule, and Jesus might well have asked why God's people were under pagan rule. It was because of their sins and faithlessness and not by accident, and both they and we have to see that history is neither accidental nor fortuitous. God rules in history, and since the powers that be are ordained by God, see that you pay your rightful debts, for this is a duty even when that rule is pagan like Rome. What of injustice? What of bad laws? We submit even to personal loss and grief (think of God's loss and grief) but when Caesar demands what is God's by right we obey God, and we obey totally. But we must make sure our stand is unto God and not simply according to the dictates of our stubborn wills. Read the passages: John 19:10-11; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Cor. 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17.

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### **20:21-26**

"Jesus' answer does not, of course, mean that the secular and the sacred belong to two independent and unrelated compartments of life. It means that man, by the very nature of his historical existence, is a subject of two kingdoms, an earthly and a heavenly, to both of which he owes a debt of loyalty, the one conditional and the other absolute. For God deals with man partly through the impersonal and fallible institutions of society and civil government, partly through the direct and personal impact of His own sovereign love. As long as Caesar performs his God-given function of providing a framework of order for the common life of men, he has the right to claim his due; taxes are not an imposition extorted by the victor from the vanquished, to be paid under duress, but a debt to be acknowledged as a moral obligation. It is of course another matter if Caesar should lay claim to that which belongs by right only to God - the unconditional and absolute obedience of men. This is totalitarianism, the ascription of absolute worth to that which is essentially human and transient. But it is to be noted that the same result ensues if religion attempts to absorb the functions of the state. The Zealots believed that allegiance to Caesar was disloyalty to God, and that the only course open to the people of God was to regain their independence by force in order to establish a theocracy. But all theocracy is by nature totalitarian, involving the confusion of human institutions with divine ordinances. Jesus' answer ..... affirmed that it was feasible for Israel to discharge her total commitment to God even as loyal subjects of a pagan empire." (Caird)

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### **20:27-38**

These incidents are arguments designed to trap Jesus and not genuine enquiries after spiritual enlightenment. The subject here is not the doctrine of marriage, nor that of the sexlessness of angels, and certainly not a suggestion that in heaven we shall be "angels" rather than people. The subject at issue is the existence of the world to come, together with the existence of angels and the reality of the resurrection, all of which the Sadducees denied (Acts 23:7-8). When, in a quite arbitrary way, people deny and dismiss both the spiritual and eternal, they are left with a god reduced to their own size and a life confined to and inhibited by the material. Little wonder they are miserable and argumentative. The basis of the query is Deut. 25:5-6, the law of levirate marriage, the object of which was to provide a legal heir for a man who died childless. This was important to the Jew to whom continuance of the family-name was of the essence of life. In Jesus' time this law had fallen into abeyance and the Sadducees raked it up simply in an attempt to ridicule the whole idea of resurrection. According to them, and their microscopically narrow thinking, it just could not work and therefore the resurrection could not be. But Jesus made plain that in the resurrection existence, when death has no more place, marriage, as we now know it, is no longer necessary. But heaven is more, not less than what we know now.

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## 20:27-38

Jesus turned an argument into an occasion for instruction and for correction of wrong ideas about eternal things. Most errors stem from a defective doctrine of God and ignorance of the Scriptures (Mark 12:24). Heaven and the eternal state must not be thought of as merely an extension or projection of this kind of earthly life we now know, nor must it be thought of as a cessation or cancellation of what we now know. Quoting from Exodus 3:6, which the Sadducees accepted as Scripture, Jesus pointed out that their unbelief in the resurrection was a denial of their own position, for God calls Himself, "The God of Abraham". This implies that Abraham is alive and not dead, and since he was the friend of God while he was here on this earth, it is incredible to think that the friendship was severed by death. Indeed it reached its fulfilment in the world to come in a way it could never do here in time, because of the weakness of human flesh. Friendship with God now is ratified and consummated in the world to come, and what has been a delight and a fulfilment here will become even greater there. In like manner, human relationships, forged and developed in the will of God and knowing His blessing now, will flower into their truest and fullest expression in the world to come, not only in terms of enjoyment but also in respect of spiritual service. This will indeed be to glorify God *and* to enjoy Him forever.

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## 20:27-38

This theme is so fascinating and satisfying we must pursue it further with the help of the whole of 1 Cor. 15, especially v.35-44, where we begin to see the "bare grain" becoming "full grown corn" with a glory of its own, the glory of fulfilment in harvest rather than the glory of promise in spring. It does not yet appear what we shall be (1 John 3:1-3), but in Christ it is all there in embryo and will not be denied. Here we grasp at moments of enjoyment of life, there it will be ours in fulness (Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5). Remember that there are two worlds and that this one is the shadow and the one to come is the reality. It may be difficult to grasp exactly what that world will be, but our incapacity to grasp does not invalidate the truth. Perhaps as we grow older in Christ our awareness of eternal things and our anticipatory grasp of them will become clearer and stronger. We must not allow the Devil to filch away our hope in the life to come just because we are so time-bounded in our thinking. One young boy heard the hymn, "The hill of Sion yields a thousand sacred sweets" and his childish mind was attracted to this picture of ultimate bliss. Certainly, for him, heaven was going to be pleasurable! If you try explaining the delights and fulfilments of marriage to a youngster you would find it cannot be done because he has not yet the registration necessary on that level of experience. But the reality remains and his appreciation will come. D.L. Moody said, "One day you will read in the press that Moody is dead. Don't you believe it. D.L. Moody will be more alive that day than ever before." More alive! That is heaven, and Christ is the way.

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## 20:39-40

These battles of words between Jesus and the Jewish leaders proved to be very revealing, because apart from the reaction of a few scribes, whom Jesus seems to challenge in v.41, these men remained unmoved by our Lord's massive arguments from the Scriptures. It became more and more evident that nothing but the destruction of Jesus would satisfy them, and it is a battle of this dimension between truth and error, God and the Devil, that is the context of our studies. It is always true to say that Satan is most likely to be found *in and around* a true spiritual work. Do not be surprised to find the Devil in the inner fellowship. It was so in Jesus' work (22:3) with a man who kept his position, apparently without suspicion, but who had the most immense reservations about Christ and His work, and who in fact worked secretly and persistently against both. This is quite frightening. But note here that Jesus shows not the slightest intention of contracting out of the battle but rather carried it into the enemy's territory, acting with a swiftness and sureness that is glorious to see. Wicked men were exhausted and drained of ingenuity so that no more questions were forthcoming. Even Hell could not whip them into activity, and at this point we see a most comforting lesson. Can you imagine the chagrin of the main body of Jesus' enemies when these scribes (39) made their public testimony? Perhaps it just slipped off their lips and they regretted it instantly. But the words were spoken and hell is seen to be divided against itself.

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### **20:39-40**

It is important to see the essential division, disharmony and discord of the kingdom of evil. Such a kingdom cannot stand, as Jesus Himself had already declared (Luke 11:14-22). There may be and will be coalitions of evil, men and women and movements who hate each other but who are prepared to unite in enmity to Jesus. And, no doubt, many victories will seem to be won by evil, yet we must be persuaded that hidden in and operative in all the schemes of hell is the sovereign will of God. This is supremely true of the Cross. It was a work of evil men with evil intentions and yet it was God's glorious triumph (Acts 2:22-24). We need to remind ourselves often that God is never in doubt as to the issues of His work and that is why at any and every given moment He is altogether at peace within Himself. It is this peaceful assurance that we see here in the complete and calm mastery of Jesus, who at this point took the initiative and carried the argument to the unwilling and incompetent scribes. This is the lesson: the initiative is always with Christ (Luke 22:53; John 13:27; Rev. 12:12; 13:5-7; 17:12-17). Never doubt this, and in the day of evil's power, stand your ground as you have a right to stand, *in Christ*.

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### **20:41-44**

Having silenced His enemies, Jesus refused to let the matter rest. Of course, there is a time for us to submit in the face of evil, and to do otherwise is to be working contrary to God (22:47-53). It can also be blindness to facts and an undue sense of our own importance and indispensability (Matt. 26:53ff.) which is often followed by cowardly desertion. But there is a time to speak, which Jesus now did with devastating accuracy, challenging these men on their theoretical allegiance to Scripture. The passage in question is Ps. 110:1-3, and Matt. 22:41-45 helps us to sense the atmosphere of the argument. The Jews, in theory at least, looked for the coming of Messiah, thinking of Him as being one of themselves, essentially an earthly man born to be king. But their own Scriptures spoke of Messiah as being not only David's son but also David's Lord, one to whom every knee, including their own, must bow. The Messiah is, according to the flesh, a descendant of David (Isaiah 9:5-7; Matt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3) and Jesus was recognised to be of David's line. But Messiah was even more than this, as Micah 5:2 makes plain in the reference to an origin in eternity. Jesus had already, even in this chapter (20:13), made it plain He claimed to be God's own Son, and He had presented Himself in Jerusalem as their rightful King, the Messiah. But if these Pharisees once admitted the theology of Jesus, they would also have to admit His absolute claim to obedience, and this they would not do. By the Scriptures Jesus was trying here to make these men reconsider all they had heard. His objective was to win them, not to destroy them, but they would not listen. The reason why is in tomorrow's verses.

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### **20:45-47**

It was the curse of worldliness that blinded the minds and hardened the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes. Worldliness is evil, not neutral (1 John 2:15-17; 5:19), and when it is religious in its outward expression it is doubly dangerous, for it can deceive itself and by that deception lead others into its devilish, anti-Christ bondage. The inspiration of the lives of these men was exposed ruthlessly and publicly (45) and there is no suggestion of sentimental tolerance, for the simple reason that these men constituted a faction of anti-Christ power. They did not want a divine Messiah who would rule them, but a human Messiah who would be their tool, manipulated by them for the achievement of their worldly ambitions. It is always a terrible thing when we fall into the error of trying to make use of God. How total was Jesus' denunciation of their religion in spite of its seeming spirituality. But were any people really taken in by this kind of religion? Long robes, deferential salutes in public, "back-scratching" flattery, front seats on platforms for ceremonial occasions (religious or pagan) and beautifully elocuted prayers of considerable length calculated to impress men, not God, these were the marks of the Scribes and Pharisees. These men were also competently hard-hearted with regard to their rights, fees, tithes and 'perks' which they grabbed with utter inhumanity where necessary. They have their reward, and it is condemnation.

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### 21:1-4

The long controversy had wearied Jesus and He now sat with downcast eyes in the temple court, no doubt grieving over the hardness of people's hearts. He had beaten these men in argument but there was no sense of triumph because He had not won *them*. Mark 12:41 says that Jesus watched *how* they gave. Some commentators suggest that there were thirteen boxes or vessels in the court of the temple into which gifts were cast, each person calling out the amount being given, and according to Jewish laws at that time it was not lawful to give less than two gifts. The temptation to ostentation is obvious and competition must have been great among those whose objective was the praise of men. These rich men were not giving to God but simply donating surplus cash out of profits which may well have been got fraudulently (20:47). Such is our materialistic spirit that we count big sums to be significant and we are impressed by size. But by Jesus' calculation the widow's two small coins amounted to more than all the rest. Some gave generously out of their abundance but were marked by a spirit of self-congratulation. The widow gave her day's wages, with no guarantee of work the next day, and she did so because she loved God. Can you imagine what encouragement this gave to our Lord at this critical juncture in His work?

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### 21:1-4

There is an important lesson here although it must not be pushed to extremes. This widow, a woman of faith who held to the promises of God as they were symbolised in the temple, was no doubt one of many who knew the harshness and graceless legalism of the Pharisees who ruled religious life. She knew also the shameful declension of the house of God, with all its corruptions and formalism, and she knew that many of her own race now despised the institution which had nurtured them in the knowledge of God. But all this made no difference to this woman's devotion, because her concern was not with the institution but with the God of the institution who remained uncorrupted by the denials of men. She was aware of the rich men and was no doubt hurt by the sight of their wealth compared to her poverty, but she was not bitter. The proof of that is her sacrificial giving. No doubt the widow went home demoralised, feeling her inferiority, possibly depressed by a sense of being no use to God because she and her giving seemed so small, insignificant, poor and weak. She had no idea that her witness and service that day would be spoken about until the end of time. She had no idea that she had ministered encouragement to the Son of God Himself. This woman was one of the remnant of faith in a day of unbelief. It is upon such that the work of God depends. Read Phil. 3:5-14 and see what Christian giving is. "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice is too great for me to make for Him." (C.T.Studd)

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### 21:5-7

It is astonishing how buildings built for God, their beauty, their past history and present reputation can become an alternative to God. How many churches built by the sacrificial giving of godly souls in time of religious awakening are now centres of gospel-denying activity which will resist any intrusion of an evangelical nature. People like the Jews are very selective in their assessment of a situation. Solomon's glorious temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. and the replacement built in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah was a comparatively small, simple structure. But this temple now, measuring with its courts 500 yards by 400 yards, was built for the Jews by Herod the Great, an Edomite never accepted by the Jews, a ruthless murderer of even his own family and the king who slaughtered the innocents at the time of the Nativity. The temple was begun in 19 B.C., and was virtually completed in Jesus' time John 2:20, but not totally completed until A.D. 63. Within seven years after that it was lying in ruins, a testimony to the righteous judgment of God. This was the Jews' temple, which they themselves desecrated by their money-grubbing, and yet they regarded the fortunes of God's kingdom as being inextricably linked with this building. But God's work is never so tied either to buildings or people. It is a work that is bound to Christ, and only those who are in and with Christ can ever be part of that work. In the New Testament it was the temple and its loyalists that were the most bitter opponents of the gospel. It and they had to go! The work must go on (Matt. 21:42-46).

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### 21:8-13

We should really take the whole chapter and consider it as a picture of the essential experience of the true people of God as history works out, under the power and judgment of God, to the final emergence of and destruction of all we mean by anti-Christ at the coming of Christ the King. It could be summed up in terms of conflict and cost, and yet there is a note of assurance all the way through. The disciples believed the staggering words of v.6 and in consequence asked the question of v.7. It may be that their acceptance of the truth was defective and they may well have thought of this disaster as a radical expedient that was to usher in immediately another earthly temple more glorious than ever. At least they were interested enough to be taught, but what they were told went far beyond their understanding and experience, just as it goes far beyond ours. Throughout the chapter the coming crisis sometimes refers to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and at other times to the time of the end, the consummation of history and the appearing of the Son of God in His glory. Certainly the effect would be a baptism of realism and a dispelling of that dread sleepiness of spirit that so easily blights our lives of discipleship. If we can believe that we are involved in issues of this dimension, we will begin to be realistic and the word of God will thrill our hearts with its promises.

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### 21:8-13

When you think that these disciples were the men into whose hands the continuance of Jesus' work was to be committed you begin to see the priority of the warning to guard against deception. All is not truly spiritual that appears to be so, and all are not anointed of God who claim to be sent to lead the people of God into new realms of experience and service. The scripture references are legion: 1 John 4:1; Acts 20:27-32; Phil. 3:1-3, 17-19; Jude 3-4, 12-13, 16-19; 2 Tim. 3:1-7, 13-14; 4:1-4. The Devil is busy and not only can he look like a Christian, he can look like an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Watch your step and refuse to be drawn away, even when all Hell seems to be let loose around you and everyone seems to be against you. Even when the world, and your own private world, seem to convulse like a dying monster, refuse to be panicked, for that would be to concede that there is no more any control, and that is simply not true. It is not the Devil who rules but God. Power belongs to God and is entrusted to Christ (Matt. 28:16-20) who has covenanted to be with us. Pages of commentary have been written to expand on the details of v.11 and we, who have seen with our own eyes pictures of the mushroom cloud of nuclear explosion, and pictures of men's feet kicking up the dust on the surface of the moon, can only imagine what "wonders" may yet come. Are you not glad that there is an almighty God who rules and commands?

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### 21:12-15

The various sections of the chapter overlap and lead into each other. Having spoken of universal commotion, Jesus now in v.12 brings the conflict and convulsion to the immediate and personal level, but still we must not fear. Men and devils will vent their hatred of Christ against Christ's people, not least because evil itself is frightened by the steady footfalls of the Almighty in the affairs of the world. It is because the Devil senses his kingdom is being shaken that he is driven to desperate measures (Rev.12: 12). But note v.13. We are never alone in all this conflict, let alone out of sight of God, for He is giving us opportunity in the midst of this confusion to bear testimony to Him and to His saving and keeping power. Of course, the Devil seeks to frustrate this before it comes, by getting us preoccupied with hypothetical situations and the words "if ... if ... if" drum in our minds until we are nearly demented. Settle it in your hearts that God has promised in the moment of crisis and demand that you will be given the very words and grace and strength you need. Is it not true that already in some measure you have proved the peace of God, which *passes* understanding? You should have been in a panic, but you were not! Will God fail? Will He prove false to His promise? You will be given words and wisdom to withstand the enemies but they will still try to kill you (Acts 6:9-15, 54-60). If they succeed, and they cannot without God's permission (Job 1:12; 2:6), they will simply send you to God who waits to receive you.

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## 21:16-19

These are sore words. A man's foes shall be those of his own household (Matt. 10:28-39) and they will persecute the believer not only for his faith in a rejected Christ but also for his separation from immorality and all barbarous and pornographic social recreation and indulgence. It is not going to be easy to stand against the tides of permissiveness when, towards the end of the age, all standards go and all restraint is loosened. But remember that persecution and martyrdom can harm only the body, whereas sin slays both body and soul and in the process destroys the personality for both time and eternity. To be faithful to God in Jesus Christ is not only safety but also life even in the midst of death, for none of the things here spoken of can mar the true personality of the believer. They are all commanded under God to minister to the good of those who have a heavenly and eternal inheritance and service. This of course needs an eye to the world that is to come, but no believer keeping company with God and living in fellowship with those who love God and His word will fail to have this eternal dimension to life and a graciously real awareness of the reality of the things that are eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Heb. 11:24-27). It is in this way and in this life as well as in that to come that we take possession of our souls, our true selves.

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## 21:20-24

The concept of days of vengeance does not feature a great deal in our contemporary Christian thinking, yet such days are real and we must learn to recognise them and so be able to deal wisely in them. The cup of human iniquity can become brimful and then there will be known the cup of the Lord's indignation. Individuals, cities and nations can reach a point where the only intervention of God will be in judgment, which will come in spite of and indeed because of privileges scorned and abused, as in the case of Jerusalem. In such a time true believers must neither resent nor resist the coming judgment, for it is a necessary thing, yet within its terribleness there lies the mystery of God's redeeming purposes for all nations (24). The terrible retribution that came on Jerusalem in its destruction in A.D. 70 is borne out by the historians. The Roman armies completely destroyed city and temple and plundered them, slaughtering tens of thousands of Jews and carrying the rest off as prisoners of war. We are told that not a Jew was left in the city. From the reign of Constantine, the city passed under Christian domination, but, in 637 A.D. it was taken by Muslims and to this day a Moslem sanctuary, the Dome of the Rock, stands on the temple mount. Jesus' prediction was terribly and completely fulfilled. The times of the Gentiles still run their course and will do so until the end of this present world order. We live in days of judgment.

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## 21:25-28

We all find it difficult to anticipate the future and to live in the light of things that must surely come to pass.

Those future things the Bible speaks of somehow seem not quite so real as the things of immediate experience, and yet coming events cast their shadow before them. We should be aware of the ultimate things of eternity because there are so many signs all around us. Perhaps our anticipatory faculty is dulled by what we deem to be the delays of God. Certainly, between Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and its actual accomplishment there was a spell of no less than forty years, and such lapses of time between the warnings and the judgments make people complacent and forgetful (Eccles. 8:11). God is not for ever nagging at the wicked and unbelieving about the judgments that are coming, because He must also speak to the believing about His purposes and grace which will surely be fulfilled. The two strands of mercy and judgment are intermingled and grow together (Matt. 13:24-30), but there is never any doubt in the mind of God as to the outcome. This is one reason why He is the God of peace. But God does not delight in judgment so that He must hasten it, rather the opposite, for He waits to be gracious (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:1-15). Redemption is never far away (Rom. 13:11-14; Rev. 22:12, 20). Would that we really believed this!

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## 21:25-28

In the corresponding passage in Mark 13 the predictions concerning Jerusalem tend to expand into prophecies about the Second Coming and the Final Judgment, whereas in Luke the sections are more defined. These verses



clearly refer to the last things. In v.11 reference was made to signs in a few places heralding the demise of Jerusalem but here, before the Second Coming, the whole world and indeed the whole creation will be plunged into fantastic commotion. The powers of heaven (26) may refer to the powers ordained by heaven, such as world empires and rulers being involved in staggering eclipse of their power, bringing political and international changes, collaborations and conflicts such as have not been dreamed of or have been dismissed as impossible.

On the other hand the reference may be to spirit and angelic powers, principalities and kingdoms being visibly shaken and overthrown in final confrontation by the powers of God and His Christ (Eph. 1:21; 6:12). Again the reference may be to the heavenly bodies mentioned in v.25, and with them the equilibrium of the whole world order of creation. If the mechanism of the universe begins to be unhinged men's hearts will certainly fear. Then the Lord shall appear personally in power and glory and this will not be some localised appearance but universal and cosmic (Rev. 1:7). Such is the glory of this all embracing coming of the Lord that we can well understand why the Bible says, "in such an hour as you think not the Son of Man comes" (Matt. 24: 44), while at the same time saying that signs will abound that the time is near. Lift up your heads, but do not fear if you are in Christ, for He comes to receive His own (1 Thess. 4:15-18; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:1-9) and to put an end to evil for ever.

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### **21:29-33**

Some of these verses occasion great difficulty. Is the reference here to the coming judgment on Jerusalem before the end of that particular generation? Does the word "generation" mean "race" and signify the marvellous, indeed miraculous preservation and continuance of the Jews as a people right to the end of time? Is there a suggestion that the Gospel writers and the apostolic church expected the return of Christ before the end of their own lives? These questions will be argued about hotly generation after generation, and we do not presume to pronounce a verdict. The exhortation later in v.36 is that the disciples should pray for strength to survive and to escape "all these things", and he cannot mean escape from the final coming of Christ. Rather than debate the unanswerable we should grasp the authority of v.33. These are the words of the One who is Himself the Divine Executor of all the purposes of God. He does not merely speak of the course of world history but, is Himself, in unity with the Father and the eternal Spirit, the Disposer of it even as He was the instrument of its creation (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22-28; Heb. 1:1-3). It is when we think of Christ in these terms that our hearts begin to be warmed, and if, along with warm hearts we maintain cool heads so that our eyes are wide open to all that is going on round about us, reading the indications of His working and the intimations of His coming, then we will be disciples indeed and we will be among the most practically-minded people in all the world.

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### **21:34-38**

Watch and pray: sound advice indeed in a world like this hastening on to its climactic moment of judgment. What a temptation there is, often by way of escape from reality, to be weighted down with indulgence and preoccupied with temporal cares so that every ounce of energy is taken up with things that simply do not matter and have no permanence whatever. This is as much an escape and a sign of weakness as the drunkard's intoxication which helps him to forget. It is not only the gross moral wrongs which militate against spiritual life and discipleship (1 Pet. 2:11; 2 Tim. 2:21-26) but also the "cares of the world" (Matt. 13:22). The safeguard is to see to it that we stand before the Son of Man in all our ways and then we will not be ashamed before Him at His coming (1 John 2:28). Jesus' words about the things to come and the impending cataclysm of judgment are not meant to inspire a spirit of curiosity that is concerned only to formulate a programme of world events and prescribe a pattern of prophetic interpretation. They are given rather to awaken His people to the practical business of life. Part of that practical attitude is to be comforted by the assurance of His words and awakened by the urgency of them. This will not mean hysterical spirituality but will lead to healthy realism on the part of those who, by faith, look for a better country (Heb. 11:13-16).

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## 22:1-2

From 9:51 we have been emphasising that the Cross was neither an accident nor a tragedy. Jesus moved deliberately towards *His* hour, and from the time of the triumphal entry He forced the pace, and the words of John 13:27 applied to the Pharisees as much as to Judas. They were trapped in the evil of their own choice and yet in it they were compelled to do the glorious will of God. There was a mounting intensity of evil and a tremendous exposure of the hearts of men. The holy season of the Passover drew near and, as at all moments of high spiritual significance and deep spiritual emotion, the Devil was not far off. The chief priests had for a long time been quite clear what they wanted to do with Jesus and only public opinion deterred them. These men went about their holy duties but murder was in their hearts. The tragedy is that they seemed to have no sense that this was a contradiction of their religion. It was the admiration of the people that prevented Jesus' arrest during the day as He taught in the Temple, and it was the wisdom of Jesus in leaving the city each night that prevented a secret arrest before the appointed time (21:37-38). There was in our Lord no brash or precipitate forcing of the issue. The timetable of God is all important and cannot be breached. Keep this in mind as we proceed with the story and let our hearts worship as we see Jesus.

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## 22:3-6

The chief priests could see no way of accomplishing their evil intent, but there was a way and the Devil latched on to it. Among the twelve disciples there was a man with a heart as contrary to God as any other enemy of Jesus and there seems to have been some sort of Satanic transference of thought between Judas and the murderers. This is not hard to understand when you think of how in any given congregation disaffected spirits come together even although they hardly know each other. Judas went off to the priests and you can imagine their fiendish delight to realise that one of Jesus' own men was prepared to do the dirty work for them. The hellishness of the whole business is seen in v.6 where it seems already clear in Judas' mind that the place for betrayal should be the garden of Gethsemane where he, along with Jesus and the other disciples, had often resorted for seasons of prayer together. To be betrayed in the council of the Sanhedrin, that citadel of formal and dead religion is one thing, but to be betrayed in the Prayer Meeting, this is something deeply hellish. Right through the chapter in v.3, 5, 21, 24, 31, 44, 48, and 63 we see the dimension of Satanic intrigue, the pressure and battle that surged round Jesus that night. In it all, He stood a King, every bit a King, and it was partly the sight of this that broke Peter's heart when he denied such a Man.

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## 22:3-6

Judas is a mystery, but is vital to the story. As the wicked priests strained their ingenuity to get Jesus killed, the treachery of Judas brought to an end any possibility of their repentance. They were trapped in their own evil design. Judas was also trapped, for Satan entered into him, having been given the latch-key to his soul. Why did Judas do it and what led him to this point when he ceased to be in any sense a free agent and became a tool of Satan? Had he followed Jesus for selfish, nationalistic motives right from the start? Would this not have become evident to the other men or were they also blighted by a self-centred spirit (24)? Was Judas trying to force the issue and so compel Jesus to manifest His supernatural power and usher in the Messianic kingdom there and then? In Matt. 26:14-15; 27:3-10 greed is suggested as a motive, yet Judas is seen as a man who committed suicide because he had not envisaged the outcome of his action. In today's verses Luke states the fact baldly that Satan entered Judas. It would seem this was the climax of a long and increasing estrangement from Jesus. It would appear that at this point the Devil had concealed totally from Judas the inward and outward consequences of his premeditated act, but the moment the deed was done the despicable man, who knew what he was doing in relation to Jesus, was overwhelmed by the awfulness of his action. He saw himself then as a mere dupe of the Devil, already cast out to shrivel up in misery and judgment. Judas, who had thought himself such an upstanding, intellectual, discerning and penetrating religious thinker, saw himself in the end for what he really was, a pathetic tool of Hell. How we need to think through to the consequences of our decisions! It would often act as a powerful deterrent.

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## 22:7-13

Campbell Morgan describes the sections of the chapter thus far as the preparation of earth (1-2), the preparation of Hell (3-6) and the preparation of Heaven (7-13). Everything was moving forwards to a climax and the dominant note is that of the sovereignty of God. The Jewish leaders had decided that Jesus had to die but not on the feast day (Mark 14:1-2). However, Judas' unexpected defection gave such an opportunity, apparently free from risk because of the secrecy of the plan, that they decided to go ahead. God's Passover Lamb would die on God's appointed day, and the decision was God's, not men's. The preparation of the Passover is told with wonderful simplicity and sweetness, and we can scarcely think of it as being part of the grim story we have been outlining. It has all the quietness of Heaven in the midst of the growlings of Hell. By noon on the Thursday all leaven had to be disposed of from Jewish houses and between about 2.30 p.m. and 6 p.m. the passover lambs had to be slaughtered and prepared for the Passover which began after sunset and which had to be observed in Jerusalem. Our Lord thus prepared for His death and at the same time prepared for the continuing life and work of His disciples by instituting a new feast. Read the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 11:23-29 and try to sense the grace that must have rested on the person of our Lord in all these things, and how disturbing and yet comforting the whole experience must have been for Jesus' men. We are indeed on holy ground.

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## 22:7-13

We must look at the simplicity of the arrangements for the Passover. While Jesus may well have spoken His instructions from supernatural knowledge, it seems most likely that He had made prior arrangements with one of His many friends in the city so that a room would be available for Him and His disciples. An empty room of suitable size would not easily be come by in a city crowded with pilgrims. A man carrying a pitcher would be a most unusual sight and may well signify a man despised by his fellows as effeminate because only women carried pitchers. But this man was a servant of Jesus in the holiest moments of His life. The water-carrier was not the owner of the house and there is ground for accepting the tradition that it was in fact the home of Mark's parents, the same house as in Acts 12:12. Possibly Mark's father was still alive at this time, but had died by the time of the story in Acts where the house is said to belong to Mark's mother. Certainly the master of the house was a friend of Jesus and called Him Master, or Teacher, and we find it easy to think then of the young man in Mark 14:51-52 as being Mark himself. Do we not see here how these friends of Jesus, accepting Him so simply and working with Him so harmoniously, were the instruments of God to prevent Judas discovering too soon where the Saviour was to be. Our Lord still had important things to say to His disciples and until this was done no one was allowed to interfere. How marvellous:

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## 22:14

This is a terrible verse with a glory of its own. All twelve apostles went to the upper room and sat down at the table with Jesus. That Judas was accepted as a true apostle by the rest of the men is beyond doubt, but Jesus knew what he was and where he had been and what he had already done (22:3-6). If we say Jesus allowed the unholy man to come into this sacred fellowship, we could go on to discuss the whole matter of church discipline and the efforts made to ensure a pure church by exclusion of some from the Lord's Table. We do not deny the need for discipline, but who is to judge? Eleven true disciples here were wrong in their assessment, but they themselves were by no means pure and sinless (24ff). In the end it was the authoritative word of Jesus that acted as the sifting and exposing agency, and that same word expelled Judas into the blackness of the night (John 13:21-30; Matt. 26:20-25). Luke seems to want to emphasise that Judas was there at the institution of the Holy Supper. Why did He allow him there? We commented on this at the end of yesterday's reading but we can go on from there to speak of the feet-washing (John 13:1-5) and think of Jesus kneeling at Judas' feet, looking up at him with eyes of pleading love and finding no acknowledgment let alone response. When peerless love like that is spurned there is nothing but judgment left. But even further, we can see in Judas' presence the courage and confidence of our Lord in the face of incarnate evil. He was not afraid, but laid hold on evil, clasping it to His heart and holding it totally powerless and incompetent until the time came for its operation to do the will of God. In the upper room the mastery was with the King Himself.

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## 22:15-20

The hour had come and after the meal together Jesus put His men on their guard This was the last Passover because the reality foreshadowed in the feast was about to be enacted in history. God's appointed Lamb was about to die once for all. We cannot here go into detailed consideration of all the problems raised in these verses. Luke was now telling his story as briefly as possible, possibly because it was already of a length to fill a normal roll of papyrus on which it was written. Read the other accounts in Matt. 26: 17-30; Mark 14:17-25; and remember that by the time Luke wrote his gospel the teaching of Paul in 1 Cor. 11:23ff. was already widely known. Luke does tell us in v.15 of our Lord's intense longing to celebrate this last Passover with them and this, linked with 12:49-50, tells us of the depth to which His holy heart was moved and troubled. Gethsemane did not come upon Him with sudden agony but as the climax of a long and deep travail, and it was all for love of these men and ourselves with them. But there was also eager anticipation, for v.16 suggests the impending opening of the gates of God's eternal kingdom, the glories and blessings of which He would share with his men. How marvellous it all is and how graphically portrayed in the bread and wine. He gives Himself *for* us and *to* us, to be shared *among* us. It is this, by the Holy Spirit, that makes our communion service such a particular blessing. The whole atmosphere (taking that word in its highest and holiest sense) of the upper room is diffused with a sense of victory and certainty and love.

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## 22:21-23

We spoke of the unique and wonderful blessing of sitting at the Lord's Table, but Judas sat through it all totally unmoved simply because his mind and heart were elsewhere. The fact of betrayal from within the disciple group was stated and immediately Jesus went on to explain how such an amazing thing would come to pass. The betrayal did not in any sense fall outside the over-ruling will of God but at the same time Judas' choice and action belonged to no-one but himself. Jesus warned him of how he was calling down on himself terrible judgment. It is here we begin to see the awful deliberateness of Judas' act. It was the fruit of long consideration and careful calculation and we must never think of this evil man as merely a "puppet of blind fate". At the same time we must also see the clear willingness and deliberation of Jesus in giving Himself up to the death of the Cross. At this point (23) there was a reaction among the disciples as they looked in perplexity at each other and at their Master. Could it be that, by the Holy Spirit, each one of them became aware of the essential weakness and treachery of his own personality and the potential each had to do this very thing? Had they all at some time been aware of impatience with Jesus, resentment at His words, and been grieved by His attitudes which at times seemed so mysterious? Little wonder that Peter later warned us all to be on guard because the Devil was on the prowl seeking which one of us he might devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

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## 22:24-30

Well might the disciples doubt their own integrity. This was the high point of history. This man they loved and served was about to die as the holy sacrificial victim for the sins of the world. The hour was fraught with eternal significance. The dark prince of Hell was on the prowl and very soon a holy work would be entrusted to these very men. But none of these things mattered to them, for they were tense, jealous, proud, jockeying for place and altogether insensitive to the agony already crushing the heart of the Saviour. Can you imagine the contempt of Judas' heart as he watched these men? Sometimes the godless have a far better assessment of our spiritual worth than we have ourselves. Yet, having said that, we must insist that the godless are wrong, because Jesus contradicts them in v.28-29. Having spoken of His example of humble service, which alone should have demolished their pride, Jesus went on to speak words which must have made them blush with embarrassment. It is not easy to be loved and trusted when your own pride and shame are stinging your conscience. Jesus did not disown them but recognised what they had already been (28) and reassured them as to what they would yet be and do. Thank you, Jesus, for such a word. We need it!

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## 22:31-34

There are volumes of sermons in these verses. The Greek word for "you" in v.31 is plural but in v.32 it is singular. This cannot mean that the others were excluded from that prayer but rather that Peter was to take the word very personally because he would be the first to go through the trial. Did Peter notice that Jesus used his old name, Simon, and did this mean that he was perhaps the ringleader of the whole proud argument in v.24? Jesus' words in v.21 mean literally, "Satan has got you for the asking." Given the open door of pride and worldly ambition, Satan had got Peter within his circle of influence and activity and the man would be sifted like wheat. Peter, and the rest, had indeed continued with Jesus (28) and would yet be mighty instruments for good (29), but at that moment their usefulness was non-existent, and this was proved by Peter's sleeping in Gethsemane, his wild swordplay thereafter and finally his denial. What added agony this must have brought to the Saviour's heart! And Peter could have been such a help, like the woman with the ointment (Mark 14:1-9). Peter learned a lot about the Devil, the hard way.

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## 22:31-34

When Peter was handed over to Satan for sifting, the purpose, under God, was to separate the husks from the wheat in the character of this man destined for glorious service. Satan's desire was to destroy the man before his real service began, but the intercession of a mighty Saviour prevailed (Rom. 8:33ff; Heb. 7:24-25). What is more, the encouragement of v.32 was given before the storm broke. This is grace indeed. Jesus' words would in due time be strong consolation. The proud disciple was not spared the sifting and the public disgrace of denial and failure. But the desolation of that experience stripped him of all his arrogance, instability and insensitivity and produced a man God could trust, the Peter of the day of Pentecost. Of course, sanctification is not really a once-for-all thing, for in Peter's life there were lapses back to the old proud prevaricating argumentative personality, as in Acts 10:9-15ff. and Gal. 2:11-14. But these were lapses swiftly rectified and, in Christ, Peter stood again in the truth. In today's verses Peter was earnest in his protestations but he had not yet learned his weakness, which learning is the beginning of strength.

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## 22:35-38

There is much talk today about leaving all and following Christ, and while it may sound very consecrated, on examination it can reveal a gulf of misunderstanding between Jesus and His disciples. Jesus reminded His men here of the earlier days (9:3; 10:4, 17) when they were sent out, relying wholly on hospitality for their sustenance and when everything went their way so that they were filled with joy. Now, things were to be different. Every man's hand would be against them and, using a violent metaphor, Jesus gave very radical advice which the disciples in their confusion of mind and heart took literally. When Jesus said, "It is enough", He was dismissing the subject because any further discussion would have been futile. These men had still a false, materialistic, this-worldly idea of the kingdom Jesus was to establish and this kind of thinking will always blind disciples to the true spiritual and eternal dimension of discipleship. But at the same time, Jesus' words make it clear to us that disciples in a world like this must be like true fighting men, determined and whole-hearted, committed to the struggle with no thought of giving up. Since the battle is spiritual, the equipment we need is the power of the resurrection and the sword of the Spirit. To this, Jesus says, "It is enough." It is indeed, for we are more than conquerors since He gives us the victory.

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## 22:39-46

We are on holy ground. In v.39-53 the scene is the Mount of Olives and the Garden we call Gethsemane, the atmosphere being quiet, tense and tragic, with the disciples asleep. In v.54-65 the scene is the guard room, crowded, cruel and noisy, the tragedy being seen in the utter alone-ness of Jesus, and the denial of Peter. After that, the scene moves on to the Sanhedrin, to Pilate, to Herod and to the Cross. In the opening movement of today's verses we have a picture of beautiful solemnity. The full moon was shining, Jerusalem was quiet because the pilgrims were mostly indoors observing the regulations of the Passover Feast, and Jesus is seen leading His band of disciples down the valley of the Kidron to the garden which was familiar to them all as a

place of prayer. Luke does not say exactly when Judas left the company of disciples but by now he was certainly gone to the Pharisees to lead them to the Garden. The eleven disciples were not aware of this but Jesus was, and already He was treading that lonely road which no-one could share with Him. What quiet drama must have throbbled in Jesus' voice as He spoke to His own chosen disciples the words of the three chapters John 14-16. John 14:31 suggests the conversation on the way to the Garden begins at 15:1, perhaps most of it in some quiet place just within the city walls, and at 18:1 the little group move outside the city to the Garden. Such is the "atmosphere" of what we now study.

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### **22:39-46**

Jesus' concern for His own is expressed beautifully in John 13:1(AV), and added to this grace we must see also His dignity and deliberateness. He makes no attempt now to frustrate Judas' hellish scheme nor does He betray any panic whatever. He is the King! The agony in the Garden is introduced by v.40, and Matt. 26:36-46 tells us of how Jesus at first asked His three most intimate companions to be with Him and to share with Him this terrible hour, as far as they were able. Think of Peter's protestations of how dependable he would prove: (v.33; Matt. 26:33, 35; Mark 14:31, 37-38; Ps. 69:20). The calm quiet dignity of Jesus before and after His terrible wrestling in prayer (Mark 14:37-42) serves to heighten the cost of the struggle He underwent in the loneliness of His willing surrender to the Father's will. Luke seems to emphasise the note of urgent rebuke in Jesus' words (46) but our Lord's words to His men were neither soft nor harsh for He knew what *they* had gone through. Baffled by His oft repeated words about suffering and death, they had nevertheless stuck by Him and their intentions were to do so no matter what happened. They just did not know their limitations. They had watched and shared the early part of their Master's earnest prayer and that small share in the spiritual conflict had exhausted them in no time and they fell asleep. But should they have fallen asleep? This was one of the high moments of their life of discipleship yet, having given Satan entrance through their selfish pride and preoccupation, they fell asleep and the prince of Hell had the Saviour all alone.

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### **22:39-46**

Like ourselves, too often, the disciples seem to have been insensitive to the mighty spiritual issues being worked out in their presence. These men were involved in something far greater than they knew and this is the reason why Jesus told them to watch and pray, to be awake and to maintain their lines of communication with God so that they would be ready when they were needed. These disciples were assailed by the principalities and powers of the kingdom of evil which were closing in on the Son of God, and we need to see Gethsemane as the personal intervention of the Devil himself in one last fierce attempt to turn Jesus aside from His willing sacrifice. The Saviour must give up His life as a sacrifice for sin. He must not just be murdered or destroyed. The intensity of the issue will be sensed if we realise that if Jesus could be turned from the Cross there could be and would be no other to do what was necessary for the salvation of sinners. Look back to v.37 and see in Jesus' reference to Isaiah 53 an indication of how much He was aware of the nature of the death He was to die. It was to be a death for others' sin, a bruising by God, a sacrificial death in which God's lamb was to be slain for sin. It was to this that He moved forward and the cost of it is seen in the agony of Gethsemane. We will never really understand it, this "sighing of an unfathomable sea of sorrow". "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow."

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### **22:39-46**

Mark 14:33-36 brings to view the most appalling conflict, which raged in Jesus' mind, heart and spirit. Luke's brief account is no less profound, and he too makes it plain that in this deep experience of agony there was no breach of fellowship, trust and love between the Father and the Son, as evidenced by the use of the word "Father". Yet, within that communion of love there was real agony, just as there was real trust as seen in John 17. The Son and the Father were one here as always, and when man and God are so united we are not surprised that ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14) are at hand to help. Yet the agony remains. What is it? It is not dread of physical suffering, although all healthy minded people have a natural aversion to pain and an equally natural

desire to hold on to life. Nor was it the awareness of the issues of this moment in the testing of Peter and the judgment of Judas and the demise of Jerusalem itself that constituted the suffering. It was the awful horror this sinless man was aware of as He was "made sin for us" (2Cor.5: 21), identified with sin in all its terribleness and in all its judgment under the wrath of the Father. We are all so tainted with sin that our capacity to register its terribleness, its offence to God, and its fierce judgment, is immensely limited. It was not so with Jesus, and as we continue to walk with Him and grow to spiritual maturity in Him we shall begin to understand as He understood the sinfulness of sin. We will see sin not only in its destructive effect on humanity but in its offensiveness to God, and in so doing we will begin to be realistic, not least in prayer.

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### **22:47-51**

The agony of Gethsemane was followed by the same calm assurance that had marked the whole of the Saviour's life. There was no weakness or fear in Jesus as He faced the enemy, but think of the agony of His heart as He was kissed by Judas (cf. Mark 14:43-45). The agony and sorrow of unrequited love cannot be measured. What do you think the reaction of the disciples was to the sight of Judas at the head of this grim mob? That it was a mob and not merely a deputation of officials is confirmed by the need for Judas to kiss Jesus and so to identify Him as the one to be grabbed. There is something grotesque about v.49-50 when you think of there being only two swords among the eleven disciples (v.38) yet a multitude was deemed necessary to come for the arrest of Jesus. It shows how blind the Pharisees were to the true situation and how earthly were their thoughts. There is also something sad in the wild fighting spirit manifested by Peter in lashing out (John 18:6-12) with the sword, especially after seeing the compulsive awe fall on the rabble in the presence of this mighty, submissive Jesus. Peter was always barging in to say and do the wrong thing, and we begin to see how necessary it was for him to suffer the humiliation of the denial. He had to learn to die to his carnal, thoughtless motivation, for here he had given the temple officers and the Roman authorities opportunity to say that Jesus was leader of a band of violent men. The miracle of healing was a "necessity", if we may use the term, for Jesus must die as the sinless Lamb and not as a convicted criminal. Later Jesus makes the position quite clear to Pilate in John 18:36. In v.51 the A.V. reads, "Suffer ye thus far," and N.E.B. has, "Let them have their way." The context seems to require us to understand Jesus as saying, "Let events take their course." That is the word of a man who knows that all is under control in the hand of God and not in the malice and power of men and devils.

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### **22:52-53**

It is clear from John 18:8 that Jesus had virtually to compel the soldiers to arrest Him and by this it must have become clear to the evil priests that, far from being masters of the situation, they were still in subjection to this Jesus they hated so totally. But by this stage such an awareness would only serve to make them hate Him the more. In complicity with evil, men reach the point of no return and it is then that they begin to face the judgment of the Son of God. Jesus challenged them in order to expose their hypocrisy and corruption. If they had had a true and valid case against Him for any misdeed they would have arrested Him much earlier and in the open. Their actions condemned themselves, not Jesus. Note how Jesus refused to allow the chief priests and elders to skulk in the obscurity of the shadows but dragged them out into the open. Then He spoke in terrible terms of denunciation telling them that they did not merely operate in the natural darkness of the night but in the spiritual darkness of hell. This was the hour of their success and it was also the hour of the Satanic powers of darkness. Jesus told these men to their faces that they, the official custodians of spiritual truth, were in fact colleagues of and collaborators with the powers of Hell. Having spoken these words the King stepped forward and began His journey to His execution.

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### **22:54**

This one verse introduces the story of Jesus in custody and then the story breaks off to tell of Peter's denial. Luke's account goes on to tell of a threefold trial before the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod, followed by the sentence of death. But if we take the four gospel accounts we find no less than five examinations. In John 18:19-25 there was the preliminary questioning before Annas, the ex-High Priest, still a man of power,

influence and hate. In Matt. 26:57-68, between one and three in the morning, Jesus was before Caiaphas and the Council, an illegal and unconstitutional meeting of that court, as they prepared their case for their formal meeting in the morning. In Luke 22:66-71 we have at daybreak the formal session of the most corrupt court the world has ever known. A mere six verses is all the space given to the record of it, because all the issues were settled the night before and this gathering was simply constituted to make the whole thing legal and "respectable". Something of the hellish determination of these men is seen in that they had Christ nailed to the Cross by nine in the morning (Mk.15:25). All this ferocity, corruption and unrestrained wickedness would frighten us but for the fact that we have already heard the powers of evil being given permission to do their hellish work (Lk. 22:51, 53). But even recognising the divine overruling, and seeing Jesus in His dignity as both King and Judge, we still must recognise the culpability of men Acts 2:23).

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## 22:54-62

We are sorry for Peter because he truly loved his Lord and wanted to be His disciple.

Yet he was a man slow to learn the truth about himself. And at the same time a man persuaded all along the line that he was "further on" spiritually than his colleagues (John 13:6-10, 37; 21:15; Mk. 14:29). Of course Peter was marked out for spiritual leadership and in due time he exercised a mighty ministry, but not until he had learned by sore failure just how full of proud willfulness he was. It was only when Peter came to an end of himself that he began to be of real use to God. When he learned and accepted his "weakness" he was "strong" (2 Cor. 12:1-10 is a glorious comment on the principle of spiritual service). Keep in mind that Peter was not the only disciple in the premises of the High Priest (John 18:15-16); John's presence could well have accentuated the pain and shame of Peter's denial. It is hard to look friends in the face after our failure yet it was probably John himself who cared for Peter right through until Jesus sent for him after the resurrection (John 20:2-4; Mk. 16: 7; Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). What are we to say of John's action in opening the door for Peter? It was a well intentioned act that turned out to be disastrous in its immediate consequences yet proved to be the best thing that could have happened to Peter. Never forget the words, "I have prayed for you" (22:32). They tell us that the Lord Himself goes with us step by step through the valley of humiliation.

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## 22:54-62

It is customary to speak of Peter's denial in its significant stages of development. He followed afar off, at a distance (54); he sat down among them (55); he denied his Lord, and went out and wept bitterly (62). Whether it was thoughtlessness, bravado, or an attempt to make himself appear just one of the crowd that made Peter sit close to the fire we cannot tell. Certainly if he had been content with a darker place the light would not have shown him up as one of Jesus' company, and if he had been willing to sit quietly instead of talking so much his speech would not have betrayed him as a Galilean (59; Mk. 14:70; Matt. 26:73). What was Peter talking about, if anything? Was he just babbling as frightened insecure people are apt to do? The first challenge to Peter was an opportunity to witness but it was refused by his denial, and the second failure was prepared for. The second challenge came from a man (58) who may well have wanted to know about Jesus although he may also have been totally antagonistic, and Peter's second denial made the final one virtually certain. Peter grew more and more demoralised and when the cock crowed he departed in bitter tears. But remember this: the fact that the Lord turned and looked at Peter (61) would have had no significant benefit had not Peter at the very moment of his denial turned and looked at Jesus. What Peter saw was the look of infinite love mingled with sorrow which reflected the Saviour's heart. It was this that broke Peter's heart, and we can well imagine the dark sorrow of the following days until, in the resurrection, Jesus called for Peter to come to Him (1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34; Mk.16: 7).

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## 22:63-65

Luke's account of the trials of Jesus before the Jewish authorities is brief yet conveys vividly the humiliation and suffering our Lord had to endure. What we read in these two verses possibly took place between the trials.

Having been treated as a common criminal in His arrest in the garden, Jesus was now taunted and



mocked as an impostor. There is something revolting and repulsive about the ribald and blasphemous jesting and cruelty of these soldiers who, without giving a thought to the evidence, or lack of it, took the verdict of the priests as final.

During all this the Jewish leaders stood back, enjoying it all, as they tasted the triumph of having this Jesus totally in their power. Their aim was directly or indirectly to do Jesus as much harm as possible in both mind and body, and to this end they mocked, beat, slandered, blindfolded and taunted Him. This is always the technique of hell and when you see this ruthless spirit of hurt and humiliation in operation, recognise it for what it is, even when it is clothed in garments of spirituality as in the case of the Jewish priests. Our Lord's dignified silence (Isa. 53:7-8) not only marked Him out as a King indeed, it also exposed those wicked men for what they were, blasphemous colleagues of the antichrist. They counted the Son of God as a mere nothing and there is little difference between these men and those of our own day who cannot be bothered with Jesus. It was concerning these men that Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them" (23:34). But the Jewish leaders were not acting in ignorance (John 9:41; 15:22. But see also Acts 3:13-17; 1 Cor. 2:8; Acts 13:27; 1 Tim. 1:13). The question remains, why did they not know Him? They *refused* to know, and for this there is no remedy.

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### 22:66-71

As soon as it was day it was legal for the Jewish council to meet and to ratify the preliminary trial held during the night. Their aims were quite specific: to formulate a charge they could present to Pilate so that the Roman authorities would pass the death sentence, and also to bring forward an accusation to the people that would turn public opinion against Jesus. If they could get Jesus to confess to being Messiah (King) they would accuse Him to Pilate as a danger to Caesar, and if He confessed to being the Son of God they would accuse Him to the people of blasphemy. These wicked men came to the point right away but Jesus' answer (67-68) was a devastating indictment of their hypocrisy and indifference to the truth. This was not the first time that these religious men had been so exposed (20:1-8). With simple strength, taking the initiative as He had done all along, Jesus quoted from Daniel 7:13-14, and declared that from now on, as the divine Son of Man, He would be associated with God in power and glory for the purposes of judgment. That was a claim to divine authority and rule and enough to condemn Him before Pilate. Their next question, very specific, received a categorical affirmative answer and that was enough to inflame the minds of the Jewish pilgrims against Jesus. They had won. They had ignored warnings and appeals. Their blasphemy was manifest. They had come to judgment.

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### 23:1

The whole Council (Assembly) rose from its formal sitting to take the convicted prisoner to Pilate. Twenty-three members present were needed to form a quorum to deal with capital cases and a two-thirds majority was needed for a verdict of condemnation. If no clear majority was given by the twenty-three the number could be increased right up to seventy-one. Was this like a rigged "presbytery" (elders, in 22:66) with only those whose votes could be counted on having received notice of the meeting? Was Joseph of Arimathaea there (v.50-51) or Nicodemus (John 5:1; 7:50-52)? Were there others in that meeting of the Council who had a conscience for righteousness and a faith in Christ (John 12:42-43; 19:38)? Did they stand to record their votes, those voting for acquittal being counted first, or did they keep silence, perhaps even voting against their conscience to keep the peace and their jobs? Perhaps on such a dangerous and controversial subject the "powers that be" would have seen to it that a unanimous decision would be recorded. It would be so much more convenient! Did no one speak a word for Jesus, not even Gamaliel who spoke so well later in Acts 5:34-40? What would *we* have done?

What do we in fact do in situations far less loaded and less dangerous than this one? Do we say, "If I had been there ..... I ....." That is what Peter said, and we know how it fell out with him.

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### 23:1-7

How difficult it is for anyone to escape from the scrutiny, examination and judgment of Jesus. Certainly it was Pilate who was being questioned and not Jesus, and this is all the more amazing when you recall what had gone before, from the Triumphal entry and cleansing of the Temple to Gethsemane, then the treachery of Judas, the

arrest, the guardroom and the Sanhedrin. Think of the toll on this true man after the agony of prayer and the sleepless night of cross-examination and brutality. He now stood alone, yet He was altogether kingly, and Pilate by comparison was small, weak and pathetic. The accusation in v.2 was patently false, as evidenced by Luke 20:21-26 and John 6:15 together with Matt. 14:22. When Pilate asked if this bruised figure was a king, Jesus really turned the question and said, "What do *you* think?" We should insert John 18:33-38a here. Pilate gave his considered opinion as Roman judge in v.4 but the Jewish leaders (Pharisees and Sadducees together even though they hated each other) refused the verdict and began to force the hand of the law. Now, Pilate had on occasions met the fierce fanaticism of the Jews and subdued it by force, for he could be callous and ruthless when it suited him. But this time, for reasons best known to himself, he did not want to risk open conflict and the possibility of a report reaching Rome. He began to give ground in his own thoughts, even though he was troubled (John 19:18), and instead of releasing Jesus according to his verdict of innocence he looked for a way to escape from decision. Read John 19:12 and understand how quickly Pilate jumped at the chance of passing the issue to Herod. How all these men are judged by their own actions!

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### **23:8-11**

We concentrate on Herod but must not ignore the priests and scribes who followed Jesus to Herod's court, baying like hounds tracking down a tiring beast. They had the scent of the kill and their blood-lust would not be denied. Herod treated the whole thing as a joke or diversion and when Jesus refused to perform a miracle for his entertainment and even refused to have an interesting religious argument, the king turned nasty. After all was not Jesus treating him with contempt by His persistent silence and by earlier slurs on his character (Luke 13:31-32)? Herod's soul was already lost. His day of grace had gone, and that is why Jesus said nothing. There was nothing to say. Think of Herod's story. In earlier days he heard gladly the preaching of John the Baptist (Mk. 6:14-28) and later was disturbed by news of Jesus' preaching (Luke 9:7-9) and was more than interested. But, as the story in Mark tells, John's rebuke of Herod's evil life did not produce repentance, and in due time, in an evening of drunkenness and debauchery, to please a wicked, worldly woman, he denied his conscience and sold his soul. When a man has chosen to be willfully blind to spiritual things and is morally decadent, then begins to show a mere curiosity about Jesus, he is met with silence. Herod had come to his judgment day.

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### **23:12-25**

In creating a permanent breach between themselves and God, Herod and Pilate found a mutual friendship for the remaining few years of their miserable lives in this temporary world. What a bargain! But men still make it. Pilate was still faced with his momentous decision concerning Christ and his utter weakness is seen in the contrast between his words in v.14-15 and his proposed action in v.16. This was simply a concession in the interest of compromise, but such manifest weakness urged these wicked men to go on demanding the absolute verdict of death. They saw that Pilate was already trapped and they had no mercy on him. There is doubt as to the authenticity of v.17 but Matt.27: 15-22; Mark 15:6-11; and John 18:29-40 all refer to this custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover, possibly a political move to calm down the high nationalistic feeling of the Jewish pilgrims. By this time the street crowd were incited to demand Barabbas. These were probably different people from those who shouted "Hosanna", as the devout would mostly have been indoors observing the feast. Certainly the leaders of the Jews were not averse to using a city gang of rascals and rogues to gain their end religiously and politically. It is all very up to date.

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### **23:12-25**

There is always a section of the community willing to allow itself to be manipulated to carry out the designs of wicked men, and the more fiendish the plan the bigger and louder will be the demonstration. Think of the crowd snarling for the death of Jesus, idolising a thief and a murderer in the process. Compare this with Acts 17:5-9; 19: 23-34 and see how a chanting crowd can lose every sense of its original protest and objective and become, wittingly or unwittingly, the instrument of evil powers. It would have taken courage of a kind Pilate just did not possess to withstand this kind of mob-blackmail. He lacked the moral

fibre simply because right through his life he had been this kind of weak man, evading the issues of morality, righteousness and justice in the interest of easy peace, however temporary. Note how pathetically Pilate tried to reason with the crowd, as if they had some finer feelings which could be appealed to, and note also how each time (16, 22) he offered the bribe of a hideous and bloody scourging. The one thing that mattered to Pilate was that he should come through unscathed, and to that end he ignored even the warning advice of his wife (Matt. 27:19). Even though his sympathies were with Jesus and he had nothing but contempt for the Pharisees and for the rabble, Pilate surrendered to the clamour of injustice. His hand-washing gesture in Matt. 27: 24-26 persuaded no-one, not even himself. It was not for Pilate to pass any judgment on the day's business. The world has done that ever since in the words of the Creed, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate".

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### **23:26-31**

How grim is the story! We pass from the weakness of Pilate and the grim blood thirstiness of the rabble to the morbid curiosity and sorrow of the crowd, to the contempt of the rulers, the frivolity of the soldiers and the invective of the criminal, and finally to the dying form of the Son of God. Over it all stands the testimony of Scripture: God so loved the world ... (John 3:16); God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself ... (2 Cor. 5:19-21); Christ died the just for the unjust ... (1 Pet. 3:18); Christ also suffered for you... He bore our sins on the tree ... (1 Pet. 2:21-24); the Son (by Himself) made purification for sins ... (Heb. 1:1-3 A.V.); He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself... (Heb. 9:26). "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me?" (Wesley). Before we deal with any more detail of the passage take your hymn books and ponder the words of such hymns as "When I survey the wondrous Cross", "There is a green hill", "O come and mourn with me", "O sacred head sore wounded", "By the Cross of Jesus standing". Let your heart be involved, but not in pity such as the women in today's passage expressed. Then understand the passion with which Paul spoke the words, "He loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20)... "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

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### **23:26-31**

Think of what Jesus had undergone in terms of suffering and strain from the time of the triumphal entry, culminating in the scourging recorded in Matt. 27:26. The visible, physical agony is but a reflection of the spiritual agony and we can understand the need for Simon to be conscripted to carry the heavy cross-beam of the gallows. Here is another intervention of God making sure that the Saviour's death would take place outside the city wall. This was a critical day for Simon from Tripoli, in North Africa. From Mark 15:21 it seems that at least two of Simon's sons became believers and the reference in Romans 16:13 seems to be to the same Rufus, a choice or eminent saint, and to his mother also a believer. It would appear that Simon died soon after the crucifixion but not before he had told his family of this story which we now read. The evil crowd, having gained the desired end of the sentence of Jesus, seemed to have grown strangely silent and the air was now filled with the sympathetic mourning of many people who had good cause to like Jesus because of all His words and works of mercy. It may have been that their attitude was, "Poor Jesus," and while Jesus did not despise their sympathy, He did not seek or need their pity, for He was not a victim. Let it be said here that these women were not the close companions of Jesus for their grief would have been too deep and terrible to be expressed so publicly. The burden of Jesus' words to the mourning women was a final call to repentance in view of the judgment on the Jews and Jerusalem that would be ushered in by His death. If the innocent Jesus (the green tree) suffers such a fate as this, what would be the fate of guilty Jerusalem (the dry tree)?

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### **23:32-33**

Here is the final fulfilment of Isaiah 53:12, "He was numbered with the transgressors." This is the culmination of Jesus' baptism, the significance of which is that He then, freely and willingly, "numbered Himself with the transgressors," for He had no sin of His own of which to repent in the act of submitting to John's baptism. He stood in with the sinners, took their place, lived their life, and now He was to die their death. His death was not for Himself but for us. In v.32 we see Jesus led away as one of three criminals. If He is indeed taking our place,

and we are in God's sight condemned men and women, then Jesus is in fact "God's criminal". "He was made sin for us, He who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). It was a death of punishment, judgment, and a price being paid. But if v.32 identifies Jesus with the evildoers, in v.33 He is clearly set apart as separate and different from them, a fact which is later testified to by the dying thief whose perception of the crucifixion was quite magnificent and was a saving perception. Of course the man who would grasp best the grim but glorious message of the Cross would be Barabbas, the convicted criminal. He would look at that central cross and say with absolute and theological accuracy, "I should have been there." It is not our intention to try to deal with the full narrative of the story as given by the four Gospels, but one verse constantly kindles the heart of the writer of these notes. The first sermon he preached as a student was from Matt. 27:36 (AV). "And sitting down they watched Him there." If these notes take you there and make you see your Saviour, then they serve their purpose.

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### **23:34-38**

It was the women followers of Jesus who stood nearest the Cross and then no doubt gave Luke these words in v.34 which are recorded only here. Do they apply to the soldiers, the common people, the rulers, or to all of them? In a very real sense, as we have already commented, the wicked rulers knew well what they were doing in engineering the murder of Jesus and pressing on with their plan without scruple, enlisting any and every device and help to achieve their end. But blinded by their hate for this Man who had so disturbed their consciences and challenged the authenticity of their religion, and blinded even more totally by the power of the Devil, these men had no real idea of the terrible issues, to themselves and their nation, that would follow their wickedness. This is one of the mighty wiles of the Devil. He causes people to concentrate totally on the immediate situation and its manipulation, and it comes as a ghastly shock, as it did to Judas, when the implications of their actions become plain. Was our Lord's prayer answered? Can we really tell? For no less than forty years after the Cross, through the preaching of the Apostles, the Jews were called to repentance, but while some believed the vast majority resisted all along the line. This is the blindness and hardness of heart spoken of so much throughout the Bible and it can lead only to judgment, as it did for the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Read Stephen's great defence of the faith in Acts 7, especially v.51-53. What an indictment!

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### **23:34-38**

Never forget how totally unmoved evil men were by the sight of the Cross, and be persuaded that the message of the Cross is not an appeal to people's finer instincts. These people, rulers, soldiers and common religious pilgrims stood and watched with the same ghoulish indifference yet fascination that you find at a street accident. As far as they were concerned it was something happening to a man they had heard about, but it did not directly affect them. How wrong they were! It was the judgment of God on their sins, and if they persisted in their unbelief it was the judgment of God on their persons. The soldiers gambled for the victim's raiment, as was their due. The people just stood, their feelings, if any, being damped down in impotence by their fear of the religious leaders. The Jewish leaders could not keep silence, but even in their gloating shouts of insult they were compelled to bear valid testimony to the Christ, saying, "He saved others." This could not be denied, even by their diseased and tortuous minds, but they could not see that in order to save others, with a salvation far exceeding mere bodily healing, He could not save Himself. He must die, and therefore the appeals, taunting yet powerful, to come down from the Cross were in fact a repetition of the Devil's temptation in the wilderness when he tried to turn Jesus from the appointed way of doing the Father's will (Lk. 4:1-14). What we are seeing here is not merely the effects of sin being dealt with, but sin itself and its author Satan.

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### **23:34-38**

The soldiers, whose only concept of kingly rule was what they knew in their harsh, totalitarian Roman overlords, could not understand how any man claiming to be a King could be so indifferent to his own personal position and interests, and they too mocked Him. If this Jesus had any power they expected to see it made manifest now in the total destruction of His enemies, and because the Saviour remained helpless in their hands they concluded that Jesus was weak. How wrong it is to make such superficial judgments and how totally such



expression of opinion reveals the essential self-interest of worldly thinking. The vinegar they offered Jesus was a drug to give some relief to the agony of the victim, and may well indicate a certain compassion on the part of the soldiers. It was refused (Matt. 27:34) because the death He was dying was something to be done in full consciousness and willingness. It seems in John 19:28-30 that pure vinegar was offered and taken, perhaps to slake Jesus' thirst and clear His throat and enable Him to proclaim clearly that His work was finished. Whatever the motivation of the soldiers (perhaps they did not really know what their reactions were to the sight of this Man dying) it is clear that because power was not obviously manifest in Jesus they too despised Him. How many in that place would have thought of the Old Testament in such verses as Ps. 22:1, 6-8, 14-15, 17-18; 69: 20-21?

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### **23:38**

The full title on the Cross was probably, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," and it is clear from John 19:18-22 that these words were written by Pilate in order to have his personal vengeance against the Jewish leaders who, in their fanaticism, had practically compelled him to have Jesus executed. Pilate himself knew perfectly well that Jesus laid no claim to an earthly kingship (John 18:33-38; 19:8-12) and he had not failed to notice how the Jews had denied their whole spiritual inheritance in their words in John 19:15. Now he took his revenge, proclaiming by this title that the Jews were a subject race and that whoever dared to make himself their king would die in this way. Just how much Pilate knew of the truth of what he declared and refused to change, we cannot tell, but it seems certain that his objective was to humiliate the Jews rather than add to the sufferings of Jesus. Pilate wrote the truth, and perhaps his conscience was somewhat eased by doing so, just as his weak character was somewhat soothed by his disclaimer of guilt in washing his hands before the people. Yes, Jesus was the King of the Jews, the crown of all God's purposes in Israel, yet He was much more. Turn back to Luke 1:30-33 and read of His true identity and of the glory of His kingdom which has no end or limit. "King of the Jews ..... and more, God's King, God's anointed and appointed King over all; and so that Cross is seen as the throne of imperial and eternal Empire." (Morgan)

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### **23:39-43**

At first both the thieves mocked Jesus (Matt. 27:44) but there began to be an impression made on one of them. Whether it was the impressive dignity of the dying Jesus, or the blatant contemptuous arrogance of the other thief, or a combination of both that had this effect we cannot say. One thing is certain, it was the work of God the Holy Spirit, who alone is able to do this eye-opening work. That some are so moved by the message of Christ crucified and others are not remains a mystery, yet an undeniable fact of experience (2 Cor. 2:15-16). We have already commented on the glorious exposition of the doctrine of atonement given by the penitent thief in v.41. It was when this man grasped the fact of an innocent man dying willingly that he sensed his own sinfulness, and, having heard the prayer of v.34, the thief was persuaded that Jesus was the one, and the only one, who could meet his need and in mercy save his soul. In many ways the thief's faith was limited and defective, and yet, being utterly centred on the person and work of Jesus Christ, it was valid faith and brought him salvation, so that the man, converted at the last hour, died in assurance. "The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives." (F.Crosby) "Jesus knows that even in death, before His resurrection, He will be in communion with the living God, His Father, and will, free from all suffering and affliction of the earthly life, enjoy heavenly bliss with God (represented under the image of 'Paradise'). And He assures the repentant criminal that he will share with Him in this bliss, in the heavenly life of Paradise, on the very day after they have entered death." (Geldenhuys) (2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:21-23).

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### **23:39-43**

The second thief gives us a very clear picture of the arrogant impenitence of unbelieving, worldly people, and reveals a very commonly held attitude towards God. We often hear people saying, "Why doesn't God do ..... ? Why does God allow ....?" and the essence of these words is a complaint against God which charges Him with unrighteousness and unreasonableness. Such was the attitude of this thief who said, "If you are a real God, and a God worth believing in, save yourself *and us*." His demand was that God should do something instantly to get

him, and all like him, out of the terrible predicament which their sins and evil-doing had brought them into. He wanted off the hook. There was no sense of repentance or even regret, and there was every likelihood that given the opportunity he would go right back to the same kind of life as he had been living. His whole attitude was one of self-pity, not because he had done wrong, but because he had been caught and was suffering punishment for his evil deeds. But there is more than self-pity, there is that blasphemous attitude which is so idolatrous of self-will and so antagonistic to God that it continues right into eternity and to the day of judgment, still impenitent (Rev. 6:12-17; 9:20-21; 16:5-11). When people think of God only as one who will get them out of a fix and who may then be dismissed to His own quarters, they will always despise Him.

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### **23:44-45**

The time was about noon and there was darkness from then until three o'clock. Since an eclipse of the sun at the time of the full moon is impossible, we must think of a direct intervention of God in His omnipotence whereby the sun was darkened. The same act of God explains the earthquake and the rending of the veil of the Temple. In the apocryphal "Gospel of Peter" it is said that it was so dark people went about with lamps thinking it was night. This darkness lasted until Jesus was taken from the Cross, and then the sun shone out again in its brilliance so that all men could see that the great deed was done. That there should be signs and portents on such a significant day in the history of the Jews is not surprising, for such signs attended the Exodus and the giving of the Law, to name but two occasions. The darkness and the earthquake were troubling signs indeed to the unbelieving world, and the tearing open of the veil would strike awe into the heart of all Jews, beginning with the priests, for it signified that their day of power was ended, since the way into the presence of God was now opened for ever.

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut its glory in  
When Christ the Mighty Maker dies  
For man, the creature's sin." (Watts)

In a very real sense only God looked into the heart of that darkness and saw the horror and the glory of the work that was being done.

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### **23:46**

This is not the last sigh of an exhausted man who can go on no longer, but a loud clear cry of witness and testimony as well as supplication, and it signifies the full consciousness of the one who is dying and who yet retains a great residue of strength. "From Matthew and Mark we know that Jesus, when the darkness ended, called out: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' This was the utterance of the terrible sense of God forsakenness experienced by Him during those hours as our Substitute. After this, being conscious that His suffering and sin-bearing according to the Scriptures had been accomplished, He cried out: 'It is finished!' (John 19:30), and then entered into death after He had said: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!' These words show us that in the Saviour's mind there was again a calm restfulness after the hours of darkness and dereliction were past, and He was again conscious of the closest communion with God. In addition, it shows us that Jesus, after everything endured by Him spiritually and physically, then revealed that He was the Lord of life and death, who died, not because He was forced to do so, but because He Himself of set purpose and voluntarily laid down His life as the perfect Sacrifice. And so, having committed His spirit to God, He died." (Geldenhuys)

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### **23:47-49**

Jesus died triumphantly and the first fruits of that death are seen in the words of the Roman centurion. Who knows but that his was the voice that expressed the thoughts of many hearts that glorious and terrible day. Had the chief priests and elders gone away by this time, or did they witness things to the last? Perhaps they had gone home after arguing the point with Pilate about the superscription on the Cross. Perhaps, having murdered the

Son of God, they had gone to the Temple to engage in some "holy" service. Their subsequent reaction is recorded in Matt. 27:62-66, where their restless uncertainty even in seeming victory is very obvious. In Mark 15:39 the centurion's confession seems to have been even more radical and perceptive. Here was a pagan man who saw the work of the living God in the death of Jesus Christ, and he acknowledged the rightful claim of that Jesus Christ on his life. What a victory of grace!

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### **23:47-49**

What a tremendous impact the personal character, bearing and speech of Jesus had. A dying scoundrel in v.40-41 bore testimony to His innocence and the hardened Roman centurion here declared His righteousness. In like manner the crowd, now that their passionate demonstration of nationalism and their fiery religious bigotry (so easily manipulated for evil ends) had climaxed in the death of Jesus, began to have second thoughts. They went home, beating their breasts, agitated, disturbed, and more than a little fearful about what they had been party to. But, of course, it was too late then to disclaim responsibility. Did they wonder if they had been made pawns in an evil, political-cum-religious scheme the end of which was power for men rather than glory for God? No doubt these people had an uneasy presentiment of terrible consequences yet to issue from this day's deed. What exact part was played in this disturbing of conscience by the sight of Jesus, the words of Jesus and the awesome physical manifestations of darkness and earthquake, we cannot tell. Certainly by means of all of them the Holy Spirit was already working a conviction and a softening which was soon to bear fruit in the preaching of the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost. But for seven long weeks these men and women would have to live with a burdened conscience and a growing awareness that they were guilty before God.

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### **23:47-49**

There was a tremendous sense of the presence of God at the Cross and yet, even for Jesus' friends, it was not a clear nor a fully understood experience. We like to think of the Chief Priests having already departed from the scene, possibly summoned by the Temple authorities when the veil was torn (45). This was to them a terrible tragedy for it meant that the holy shrine of their God was open to view and this could not be allowed. After all, they were God's custodians, they held the key to His presence (or so they thought) and they much preferred a closed in God to a God made available to all. How we need to guard against this temptation, so easy to succumb to in evangelical circles, that we "have the true God". He is not ours to guard and keep as our right but ours to proclaim, and if we will not fulfil our charge it will be taken from us (Matt. 21:43; 23: 13-15).

Having been removed from the scene, the evil Pharisees were later to discover that the death of Jesus had moved public opinion to such an extent that they had to proceed very carefully, and it may have been this awareness that restrained them from persecuting the disciples right away. Later, when the full extent of the impact of the death and resurrection of Christ became evident, the fury of Hell could not be satisfied except by persecution. But even this, in scattering the disciples far and wide, became an instrument under God for the furtherance of the Gospel (Acts 8:1). It is interesting to note the progression to the point of persecution because it indicates the uncertainty of these evil men. Trace it in Acts 4:1-2 - grieved; 4:13-21 - annoyed but helpless; 5:17-24 - roused but frustrated by God; 5:33-40 - murderous but limited to brutality; 6:10-14 - their old technique of perverting justice; 7:54-58 - murder; 8:1 - persecution, by which the work spread.

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### **23:47-49**

The stream of events outlined in yesterday's note should cause us to be aware of the sovereign stirring of God in His purposes of grace in the very moments following the death of His Son. If only our Lord's closest friends had been aware of this, as they should have been, how much their grief would have been eased and how they would have been helped to bear the days of dark shadow and uncertainty. The majority of Jesus' followers had fled in the crisis and had watched the crucifixion from some distance away. They would not have heard the "words" from the Cross, nor the penitential prayer of the thief, nor the centurion's great declaration. Perhaps they did not sense to the full the awe that came on the people's hearts when Jesus died and they may even have missed the hopeful stirrings expressed in the common conversation of the dispersing crowd. How much we miss when we

are far away on the outer perimeter of a great work of God! But we know from John 19:25-27 that our Lord's mother and some of the women, together with John himself, were close by the Cross before Jesus died and it is from their own testimony that we have the terrible details of John 19:31-34. Think of the agony of their love. If only they had known all that was happening. Some suggest that Luke's words "those who knew him" (his acquaintances AV)) include James and Jude, our Lord's brothers after the flesh. Could all Jesus relatives have remained detached from what was happening? Who knows but that this was the time they were constrained to believe. Our Lord was indeed beginning to see of the travail of His soul (Isa. 53:10-12).

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### **23:50-56**

There is exquisite beauty here. Only the hands of those who loved Him touched the dead body of Jesus. Joseph, a secret disciple, together with Nicodemus (John 19:38-42) another ineffectual disciple, came forward with magnificent courage and went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus in order to attend to the burial with love and respect. The prophecy of Isaiah 55:8-9 was fulfilled. Jesus was allocated a grave along with the malefactors, for in the eyes of the law He died a criminal, yet, because of the love of His secret disciples He was with the rich in His death. The hour of His humiliation was past and at once He was found in the dignity that befitted His person, in a newly hewn tomb, waiting the third day. Were the women surprised by these two significant members of the Sanhedrin risking the wrath of their colleagues by coming out into the open and declaring themselves Jesus' men? It is amazing how a time of crisis can expose the superficiality of the discipleship of many loud-mouthed people such as Peter and at the same time can discover radical discipleship which, up to that point, had been somewhat timorous and ineffective. We know nothing of Joseph except what is recorded here, although some have tried to identify him with the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16ff.). He was a man of expectant but unenlightened faith within the old economy, in a time of decadent religion. But, like Simeon (Lk. 2:25-32, 38), the eyes of faith opened clearly at a given point of experience when confronted with the fact of Jesus.

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### **23:50-56**

How clearly it is emphasised by the detail here that Jesus did really die. This is of vital importance, because if the Saviour did not die, there is no Gospel, no assurance and no comfort. But all the facts declare that the Lamb of God has died to take away sin. No one who took that body from the Cross for burial had any doubt at all. Jesus died about three in the afternoon and by the time Joseph had laid the body in the tomb it was the evening hour, which marked the beginning of the next: day, the Jewish Sabbath. The Law of the Jews required that the body of the criminal be buried by nightfall (Dent. 21:22-23) and this was done. The Law also required the observance of the Sabbath and even the wonderful love of the women for their Master did not allow them to break the Sabbath and they had time only to prepare spices for the embalming of the body. It was their intention on the first day of the week, that is following the Sabbath day, to pay their final respects to the dead Jesus (Mk. 16:1. How accurate the Bible is. Everything confirms the death of Jesus and in so doing validates the resurrection. Pilate made sure before releasing the body (Mk. 15:44); Joseph had no doubts; the body was laid in an unused tomb so that there was no doubt that it was Jesus who rose again; it was a tomb hewn out of rock so that there was no possibility of a secret passage allowing entry to anyone to filch away the body; and the women watched carefully so that there was no doubt as to the identity of the person laid in the tomb. Even the careful preparation of the spices testifies to death. The Lamb of God had died.

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### **23:56-24:1**

Read Matt. 27:66-28:1; Mk.15: 47-16:1; John 19:42-20:1. There is nothing recorded of the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The disciples were desolate; the Pharisees triumphant but uneasy; the crowds of pilgrims were troubled and the soldiers had returned to their duties perhaps having forgotten about the previous day's execution. Pilate would be justifying his actions to his conscience and to his wife, Judas had committed suicide and Peter, shattered and humiliated, was being cared for by John. It was a day of sorrow, but it should



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not have been so. All these people involved were looking inward to their own feelings and reactions instead of outward to the facts as they had been taught them. What are these facts?

“O perfect life of love!  
All, all is finished now,  
All that He left His throne above  
To do for us below.

“No work is left undone  
Of all the Father willed;  
His toils and sorrows, one by one,  
The Scripture have fulfilled.

“ And on His thorn-crowned head,  
And on His sinless soul,  
Our sins in all their guilt were laid,  
That he might make us whole.

“In perfect love He dies;  
For me He dies, for me!  
O all-atoning Sacrifice,  
I cling by faith to Thee.” (H.W.Baker)

Well might we cling to the facts for they signify that all God's purpose of salvation for His people has been fulfilled and already His plans are beginning to work out. Read Jesus' words in John 17:1-6 and think of the bigness of His thoughts about you and me.

### 24:1

Some modern translations begin this verse with the word "But", and that stands gloriously over against all the apparent triumph of evil and all the desolation of unbelief and disappointment on the part of the disciples. Read the story in John 20:1-31, Matt. 28:1-20 and Mark 16:1-20, before we study Luke's account in detail. Easter is a time for song, grounded in and inspired by the facts of the resurrection. Turn to the appropriate section of a hymn book and let the theology of the resurrection facts thrill your heart. Sin is vanquished; death is vanquished; the tempter is foiled and all our enemies are conquered! Now read the apostolic preaching and application of the resurrection message in Acts 2:22-40 and 1 Cor. 15, especially v.1-8, 12-23, 51-58. These words of Paul were written about ten years before the earliest of the Gospels. The message is unambiguous. JESUS IS ALIVE. Never forget it, for He is alive as a mighty conqueror who is able to save to the uttermost.

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### 24:1-3

Luke's account of the resurrection selects incidents from the morning, afternoon and evening and his story begins with a touching account of the devotion of these women. Believing Jesus was really dead, and in spite of the possible repercussions from the powerful Pharisees, they were determined to show their love and loyalty. Believing Jesus to be dead, the women were essentially without hope and in consequence they had a vast problem which worried them. Who would move the stone to allow them to express their love to their Master (Mk. 16:3-4)? But this significant barrier was removed before they came to it. Matthew tells us there had been an earthquake and an angel to roll the stone away. This had effectively terrified the soldiers of the guard who had, we assume, then fled. There was nothing to prevent the discovery being made by the disciples. Had the Lord Jesus expected His own to come looking for Him? Had He anticipated their unbelief and planned that the

discovery would be made gradually as they were able to receive it? Would this explain the angelic messengers rather than the direct, appearance of Jesus Himself? Why did Jesus, risen from the dead, not simply burst in on His disciples in the -upper room? We cannot really answer these questions for it is simply a narrative of events that is given us. But could it not be that He was giving His disciples the opportunity to rectify their unbelief, to recall what they had been taught, and to be blessed in believing the truth without miraculous signs to confirm it (John 20:24-29)? Certainly we are dealing here with the astonishing blindness of unbelief.

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### **24:4-8**

If unbelief is blind it is also stubborn, and we begin to understand why Hebrews 3:12-13 speaks of an evil heart of unbelief which has a hardening and deceiving effect. The open grave, the absent body and the presence of the angels failed to quicken faith in these devoted women. But, just as angels had heralded the birth of Jesus (2:8ff) to an unsuspecting world, so now angels heralded His resurrection. At the Nativity the angels' first words were of comfort, "Fear not," but here they are of rebuke and challenge, for there is no excuse for unbelief. It is not weakness; it is sin. However sincere the devotion of these women, perhaps they should not in fact have made this kind of journey to the grave for it was a confirmation of the fact that they still believed Jesus was dead. Of course, the disciples huddled in the upper room were equally guilty of unbelief (John 20:19ff). The angels make plain that they all should have grasped the fact that it was impossible for the Lord of Life to be held by death, and that the resurrection, as the confirmation of the glorious victory of the Cross, should have been expected. They had been told this again and again (9:22; 18:31-33) but had failed to grasp it, and the truth had slipped away from their conscious minds (Heb. 2:1). So powerful is this unbelief we must consider it again.

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### **24:4-8**

Read Luke 2:49-50; 9:43-45; Mark 9:30-34; John 12:16 and be alarmed by the persistence of unbelief. Hebrews 4:2 speaks of the Word not being met with faith on the part of those hearing it. But why should this be so with the disciples as they continued in company with Jesus? They rejoiced in His words and marvelled at their power, and were blessed by them. But, at the same time, their minds were preoccupied with thoughts about themselves to such an extent that the glorious truth being taught them was debilitated and robbed of its dynamic. In like manner these disciples had so many preconceived ideas as to how Christ's kingdom would be realised that they were in many ways unteachable. Think of Peter's babbling on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30-35) and his wild swordplay in Gethsemane (Lk. 23:50-51). Think of the rebuke to James and John (Lk. 9:49-56) in respect of their service, and in respect of their pride and ambition (Mk. 10:35-45). Think of how Judas was preoccupied with total materialism even in high moments of spiritual significance (John 12:1-6). Think of the basic blindness of Philip in John 14:8-9, or go into Acts 5:1ff. and 8:18ff. to see how pride of reputation and desire for power and place tried to live even in a church that was throbbing with the power of the holy Spirit. When our eyes are on men (or on women) they are also on ourselves, and this is where our unbelief takes root, flourishes and strangles us. So it was with the disciples. The other cause of their blindness was their proud refusal to believe that things could happen in a way that was beyond their understanding. In the face of the desolating and very obvious facts of the cross a resurrection would be a miracle. That is exactly what happened and it both exposed and confounded their unbelief.

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### **24:9-11**

We have already commented on the strange but deep spirit of unbelief which afflicted the disciples and we have highlighted some of the causes of it. In v.8 we learn that it was the recollection of previous teaching rather than the receiving of new information that stirred the women into faith and activity. This, of course, is the work of the Holy Spirit who was operative then as He has been all along the course of world history. Ever since He brooded over the chaos in the work of creation, that eternal Spirit has been the executive power of God in the interest of salvation. Think of this in terms of 1 Peter 1:10-12 and marvel at the thought of what our present struggles may signify in respect of the future work of God. The quickening of the truth in the hearts of these believers was the work of the Spirit, the mighty Comforter, whom Jesus had promised for this very purpose

(John 14:26). This is why we need to store up the Word in our hearts (Psa. 119:11), so that in the critical moment the Holy Spirit may fly to the divine library and bring to us, with delay so slight it is not measurable, the very word we need (Lk. 12:11-12; Exod. 4:10-12). When the women remembered they returned and told the disciples and even though they must have carried with them something at least of the vibrant thrill and conviction of those who had had conversation with heavenly messengers, they were met with total unbelief.

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### **24:9-11**

The unbelief of the women when faced with the empty tomb is more than matched by the stubborn incredulity of the company of disciples. They regarded the women's story as delirious babblings, perhaps because they regarded women as incapable of bearing God's message, or because, if this message was true, it condemned them for being in their present position and attitude. There are many reasons for unbelief and they are more often moral than intellectual. The deadness of heart afflicting these disciples and their inability to receive the good news were no doubt caused partly by their cowardly desertion of Jesus, which course of action they had to justify to themselves. On the other hand, we must not fail to reckon on the activity of the Devil in this whole matter, for he was undoubtedly active, seeking to hinder, if not prevent, the breaking in on the world of the glorious truth of the resurrection. These disciples were key figures in the plan of redemption and in a real sense there was no-one to take their place if they failed. Of course, God could over-rule human frailty and failure at any time and bring forward men for the moment of need, as indeed He did when the risen Christ appeared to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1ff; 1 Cor. 15:8). Part of the marvel of the story is the time and effort expended by the risen Christ on persuading His own men and women to believe.

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### **24:9- 11**

Read John 20:1-3, 10, 18-29 along with Mark 16:9-14. Who is it that we cannot believe? Jesus? In spite of the plain teaching of their Master, the testimony of the women, and the fact of the empty tomb, to say nothing of the promptings and stirrings of the Holy Spirit, these disciples simply would not believe. It is still the same in our day. After twenty centuries there is found *inside* the churches a staggering unbelief. It may well be that God will start a movement of faith outside the establishment of religion, just as in the Acts of the Apostles the significant work of God moved from the Jews to the Gentiles. But there is hope for the churches in the determination with which the Lord of the church deals with His own to bring them to faith. And there is further hope in the awakening of new faith in many places inside the various denominations, our own in particular. "Admire the wisdom of God, which can bring great good out of seeming evil. The unbelief of the apostles is one of the strongest indirect evidences that Jesus rose from the dead. If the disciples were at first so backward to believe our Lord's resurrection, and were at last so thoroughly persuaded of its truth that they preached it everywhere, Christ must have risen indeed. The first preachers were men who were convinced in spite of themselves, and in spite of determined, obstinate unwillingness to believe. If the apostles at last believed, the resurrection must be true." (Ryle).

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### **24:12**

What the resurrection meant to Peter is best expressed in 1 Peter 1:3-9. If we recall the desolation of his denial and the sense of hopeless failure that must have swamped even his extrovert personality, we will realise the conflict aroused in Peter's heart by the news of the possibility of Jesus being alive. Even though it would mean a confrontation with the One he had so shamefully denied, it had a real element of hope, for Peter could still remember the look on Jesus' face in that moment when an agonised glance had passed between them (22:61). Impulsive as ever, Peter, along with John (John 20:1-9), ran to the sepulchre, saw the evidence, and wondered just what it all meant. Human nature being what it is, Peter, having blundered publicly in the denial, could well have become a bitter cynical character for the rest of his life. It is not easy to live with yourself when, having had exalted ideas of your own integrity and spirituality, you crash and you know it. Peter never thought he would deny his Lord, but he did, and some men would have reacted by burying themselves in their work to escape from the guilt of their spiritual backsliding. Some would have become bitter and brittle, loud, confident

and harsh, all in the interest of hiding their guilty secret. Some would have become miserable, shattered parodies of what they once were because conscience made cowards of them. Peter could have become any or all of these and perhaps he knew it. Little wonder he speaks in his epistle of being born again to a life of hope by the resurrection. Remember how he looked to Jesus in the moment of his denial and see here again how he ran to the sepulchre. There was no thought of fleeing the country! Recall Luke 22:31-32. That is prayer which prevails.

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### **24:13-16**

These verses begin one of the most fascinating of all the accounts of the resurrection appearances and it is given only by Luke. It repeats the familiar pattern of Jesus' presence and the unbelief of the disciples, yet it reveals many lessons. These two disciples (were they husband and wife?), who were not of the eleven (33), were returning home in the afternoon of the first day of the week. On the seven mile journey their conversation was about Jesus' death and reported resurrection, and you can imagine both the simplicity and sincerity of their involvement in the subject. When you consider Dent. 6:4-12 and Malachi 3:16-17, it is not surprising that the risen Lord went to join them. He loves to be where He is talked about and wanted, even when He may not be fully understood. Looking back on their experience (32), they realised how heartwarming it had been and the explanation was simply that Jesus had been in it. We all need to learn from this because our conversation, by and large, can be strangely devoid of any reference to the blessed Master. But it was when these disciples were together talking about Jesus that the Lord came near. It is one thing to read our Bibles and pray in private, and to make use of the various means of grace provided in services, but we lose out far more than we realise when we neglect the privilege and blessing of having a conversation about Jesus. It is out of a full heart that we speak (Matt 12:34), and judging by what we speak of, our hearts are often full of frivolity, other people's affairs, our own selfish needs, worldly preoccupations and, if we are honest, evil things and desires. Little wonder so many of our associations with people depress us!

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### **24:16**

If these disciples were so taken up with talking about Jesus, why were their eyes kept from recognising Him? We have already mentioned some possible reasons, but there are at least three others. They were going back home when very possibly they should have been remaining with the rest of the disciple group in preparation for what was yet to come. In later verses (21, 24) we learn that these two were disappointed in Jesus because things had not worked out the way they had hoped. But thirdly, their blindness may not have been judicial (that is a rebuke in consequence of failure and disobedience) it may have been a sovereign act of our Lord in order to teach these people who belonged to Him, and who loved to speak of Him, a lesson they would never forget. Having finally recognised Jesus (31), they realised that the risen Christ was no ethereal, ghostly manifestation, for on the journey they had not had one single doubt as to the reality of the humanity of their fellow-traveller. Now that He had disappeared (31), they realised that their Master was alive and was no longer subject to the limitations of time and place. Did they sense His continuing but unseen presence, or did they accept it as a fact of faith? Never try to manufacture "feelings of His nearness". That is too subjective. Be the kind of people who want Him, and He will not be slow to be there.

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### **24:17-24**

Was this passage a monologue in reply to the question in v.17, or was it an animated three-cornered conversation with the "stranger" plying the two with successive questions? So genuine were the Stranger's enquiries that the two disciples did not resent His intrusion into their private perplexity and sorrow. But even His professed ignorance of recent events did nothing to kindle their hearts or to lead them out of their despondency. How disappointed Jesus must have been. Their admiration for and love towards this Jesus who had been crucified were obviously genuine, but how totally they had confined the possibilities of His mission to this present, temporal, material world of armies and kingdoms. Jesus elicited from them the substance of their faith (19-20) only to discover that it was faith in a God who had disappointed them and left them with crushed



feelings and a sense of hopelessness. They had trusted or hoped (19) for a redemption like their fathers had known at the Exodus, a deliverance from powerful enemies, but had failed to see that a spiritual deliverance from even mightier enemies was their real need. They had really looked for a solution rather than a salvation, and this is the mistake we all make in our unbelief. We look to God to do the lesser thing when He purposes to do the greater. We limit God by our slowness of heart to believe (Ps.78:41 A.V.), and this slowness is often found among those who might well have been expected to have strong faith (Matt. 13:53-58).

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#### 24:17-24

The reference to the third day in v.21 suggests that there was a vague recollection in their minds of something Jesus had said about this day, yet they could not quite recall it or grasp it. Part of the reason for their vagueness was simply that, like modern sceptics, they had decided in a very arbitrary way that resurrections just do not happen. No doubt they thought they were being very realistic, facing up to the facts of death, and perhaps they even prided themselves on preserving themselves from emotionalism stirred up by the report of the women. After all, the facts of death were irrefutable, whereas the disciples who had visited the tomb had only a negative testimony. A missing body is not the same as a present, living Jesus, or so they concluded. They did not accept the women's story. They possibly considered Peter to be too overwrought to be taken seriously, and John was so much the mystic with a deep and personal love for Jesus that he would feel Jesus near even though He was in fact gone. They still believed in Jesus, and loved Him, and would never forget Him, and all their sympathies were with Him. But it is not sympathy that was needed but faith: faith to believe that all He said still stood true in spite of immediate appearances to the contrary. Nothing but this would rekindle hope, and without hope there would be no dynamic for service and no going forth to tell others. This was indeed a critical moment for Gospel witness. We hoped! What a sad confession.

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#### 24:25-27

Note the beginning of the dispersal of unbelief and the kindling of hope. It is by the Scriptures. And it was thoroughgoing exposition of the whole of the Old Testament rather than the stringing together of a few proof texts drawn at random from favourite passages. This is very important. When we read that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4) we must not take this to mean simply that the Scriptures record the facts. Christ died as *foretold* by the Scriptures and His death and resurrection are to be *understood* in the light of what all the Scriptures *teach* concerning them. Jesus took His own disciples to *all* the Scriptures, just as Philip the evangelist took the Ethiopian to Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:26-35), and the theme was the same, the death and resurrection of Christ. From Genesis to Malachi we have Christ promised and prepared for, then manifested in the Gospels, preached in Acts, expounded in the Epistles and glorified in Revelation. The unifying theme or message is the Cross, which, from Romans 3:25, we see as having a retrospective as well as a prospective efficacy. The whole of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament (which the disciples of Emmaus knew so well) was authenticated and validated by the death of the Lamb of God, which death was, in the mind and heart of God, a reality from before the beginning of time (Rev. 5:6). In due time, the Lamb, prefigured in all the Scriptures, came in history. His coming was anticipated by the Patriarchs (John 8:56), testified to by the Prophets (Lk. 9:30-31), and seen as the glorious fulfilment of Scripture promise in the narrative of Christ's Advent. Consider Matt. 1:22 (Isa. 7:14); 2:5 (Mic. 5:2); 2:15 (Hos. 11:1); 2:17 (Jer. 31:15); 2:23 (Zech. 6:12); Lk. 1:72; 2:25, 28; John 1:29 - "Behold God's Lamb". Did you not expect Him?

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#### 24:25-27

Our Lord's rebuke was real but not bitter and He chided them for being slow of heart to believe because there was so much about Himself in the Scriptures. With the help of a concordance study this passage by G. Campbell Morgan: "They listened to this stranger as He took their own sacred writings, and interpreted to them their deepest meaning. They listened to Him as He revealed to them the profoundest depths in the suggestive ritual of the Mosaic economy, as He breathed in their ears the secret of the love which lay at the heart of the ancient Law. They listened to Him as He traced the Messianic note in the music of all the prophets; showing

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that He was David's King, 'fairer than the children of men,' and in the days of Solomon's well-doing, He was 'the altogether lovely' One. He was Isaiah's Child-King with a shoulder strong enough to bear the government; and the name Emmanuel, gathering within itself all the excellencies. He was Jeremiah's 'Branch of Righteousness, executing justice and righteousness in the land.' He was Ezekiel's 'Plant of renown,' giving shade and giving fragrance, He was Daniel's stone cut without hands, smiting the image, becoming a mountain and filling the whole earth. He was the ideal Israel of Hosea, 'growing as the lily,' 'casting out his roots as Lebanon.' To Joel, the Hope of the people and the Strength of the children of Israel; and the Usherer in of the vision of Amos, of the 'Plowman overtaking the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed;' and of Obadiah the 'Deliverance upon Mount Zion and holiness;' the Fulfilment of that of which Jonah was but a sign. He was the 'turning again' to God, of which Micah spoke. He was the One Nahum saw upon the mountains publishing peace. He was the Anointed of Whom Habakkuk sang as 'going forth for salvation.' He was the One Who brought to the people the pure language of Zephaniah's message, the true Zerubbabel of Haggai's word, for ever rebuilding the house of God; Himself the dawn of the day when 'Holiness - shall be upon the bells of the horses,' as Zechariah foretold; and He was the 'Refiner,' sitting over the fire, 'the Sun of Righteousness,' of Malachi's dream." All the Scriptures concern Him.

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### 24:28-29

From the immediately following verses it is plain that even when the three travellers arrived at Emmaus Jesus had still not been recognised. This is important because it emphasises that what these uncertain, confused disciples needed was not primarily a miraculous manifestation of the risen Christ but a thoroughgoing course of Biblical instruction. This was what Jesus wanted to leave with them, for He was concerned about their long-term service rather than their immediate spiritual thrill. It could well have been that these disciples were so fascinated by what was being shown to them out of the familiar Scriptures that they forgot to ask who it was who was instructing them. But this forgetfulness was promptly remedied when it appeared that their companion was journeying on and they pressed Him to come in and stay. What else could they have done in response to such ministry which had unconsciously drawn them to the Teacher? Of course, Jesus did not presume upon their response of heart and made no appeal for hospitality, as some do who claim to be living by faith! Had He not been invited He would have gone on and the loss would have been the disciples'. We believe the invitation was warm, spontaneous, utterly human and real, and at the same time a spiritual response of gratitude (Heb. 13:2; Gen. 18:1-5; 19:1-3).

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### 24:30-31

This is all gloriously human yet graciously supernatural. The man who had rebuked them and searched the depths of their souls by the Scriptures was invited into their home without any trace of embarrassment on either side. They knew that this Man was good for them, and they had no offended pride when He took the leading place at the meal, gave thanks to God, and broke the bread. It was all exquisitely natural, and although these disciples had not been present in the upper room at the institution of the Lord's Supper, they had no doubt heard of it from the others, and they at once associated the simple action with the symbolic action. In that moment their eyes were opened, they knew it was Jesus, and to their astonishment He disappeared from sight. They had a moment of visual recognition but they had had some long time of instruction and fellowship, and they no doubt were persuaded that although out of sight their Master was not absent. Note the sequence: first the Scriptures, then the heart-warming which they scarcely felt at the time, then the "eye-opening", and finally being left to walk by faith. The risen Lord is unseen but He is not unknown.

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### 24:32-33

We can be blessed without knowing it and this should deter us from passing too hasty judgments on any given spiritual exercise, be it church service or private devotions. How quickly people say, "I got nothing out of it." How do you know? In retrospect these disciples became aware that their hearts had been warmed and that as the journey went on they had felt better and better. How wonderful! Unconscious blessing, like

unselfconscious service, is very healthy, for after all it is not the blessing that is paramount, but doing the will of the Lord. The blessings are the fragrant flowers plucked almost casually by the way. There is a naturalness in true spirituality which is a salvation and a blessing in itself. Think of the astonishment expressed by those being commended in Matt. 25:34-40. Would it not have been marvellous to see the faces of these two disciples as they talked so animatedly after Jesus had disappeared from sight? Note that they were not preoccupied by the fact that they had seen Jesus but spoke of the effect of the opening up of the Scriptures. It was the ordinary and the continuing factor rather than the miraculous that constituted the blessing. When immersed in the Scriptures with their glorious testimony to Christ in His fulness, these men had not been aware of their problems and disappointments, nor had they felt in any sense obliged to put on a spiritual "act" to show how holy and devoted and spiritual they were. They were just themselves, in the company of Jesus, and their hearts burned.

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### **24:32-33**

If the final message yesterday was that we should not try too hard but be ourselves with Jesus (not without Him, that would be dangerous), today's word tells us what we will be capable of in direct consequence. These disciples were set free from themselves with a clarity of thought and decision that is quite remarkable considering how disillusioned they had been just a few hours previously. It was the impact of the *facts* of the resurrection rather than the *experience* of seeing Jesus that worked the change. In v.32 there is the suggestion that they should have recognised these facts earlier when the Scriptures were being opened. On subsequent occasions, when they would know again this warming of the heart, they would know that the explanation lay in the fact of Christ risen and present with His people in power. We do not in any sense seek to minimise the subjective experience of the disciples nor even their "eye-opening", but at the same time it was the apprehension of the facts expounded from the Scriptures, by which they understood their experience, that made them into evangelists. Their dejection departed and that very same hour they set out for Jerusalem.

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### **24:33-35**

The fact that Jesus is alive is something to share with others, not simply to prolong a "lovely friendship" which had been enjoyed with a human Master, but to lay hold on the theology of salvation which is contained in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:1-14; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 3: 1-5). In the work of evangelism we must be prepared to meet entrenched unbelief even at the heart of the church, as is evident in these verses. The two from Emmaus, thrilled to the core with their new discovery, found "the eleven" gathered with a number of others, and the general topic of conversation was the resurrection. But there was by no means unanimity of reaction to or acceptance of the message. This is clear from Mark 16:12-14, and is confirmed by the next verses in Luke 24. In John 20:19-25 we are told of the evening of the resurrection day when Thomas was not present, and some suggest that just after the two from Emmaus reached the upper room Thomas departed, possibly annoyed by the emotional talk about Jesus being alive, and feeling he needed some fresh air, away from the group who were arguing the pros and cons of the situation. Perhaps Thomas was angry with Peter being once again the focus of attention, for by this time the Lord had met with Peter (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), apparently before meeting with the rest of the disciples. The two from Emmaus added their testimony. But without doubt there was still a massive element of unbelief, and at that precise moment Jesus came to them again.

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### **24:36-37**

It is difficult to co-ordinate all the resurrection appearances. From Ryle's commentary we give a list of eleven distinct appearances:

1. To Mary Magdalene alone (Mk. 16:9; John 20:14)
2. To the women returning (Matt. 28:9-10)
3. To Peter alone (Lk. 24:3; 1 Cor. 15:5)
4. To the two from Emmaus (Lk. 24:13ff.)

5. To the apostles, excepting Thomas (John 20:19)
6. To the apostles with Thomas (John 20:26, 29)
7. At the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1)
8. To the eleven on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16)
9. To above five hundred at once (1 Cor. 15:6)
10. To James only (1 Cor. 15:7)
11. To all the apostles at the Ascension (Lk. 24:51)

Three times we are told His disciples touched Him (Matt. 28:9; Lk. 24:39; John 20:27) Twice we are told He ate with them (Lk. 24:42; John 21:12, 13).

We are left with many questions. If Christ appeared to Peter, why not to John? Did John not need a "miracle" to make him believe (John 20:8)? What of Mary, His mother, did she not need a "visit" from her Son? She was left in John's care (John 19:25-27) and she is found in the prayer meeting in Acts 1:14, together with Jesus' younger brothers, to one of whom, James, Jesus had appeared after His resurrection. It is an amazing story.

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### **24:36-37**

The last traces of unbelief are dispelled by the sheer alarm caused by Jesus' appearance amongst them. It seems almost as if Jesus had decided that this persistent uncertainty had gone on long enough, for He was aware of how His disciples were still struggling between hope and despair. Can you blame them for feeling it was all almost too good to be true? Can you blame them for being afraid and wondering if they had seen a ghost? They had begun to grasp the facts and to believe the theory of the resurrection but the actuality had not yet hit them. When it did, it nearly demolished them, and it would appear that even the talkative Peter was silent, a triumph of grace indeed! The words about Jesus speaking peace to them are understandable considering the flustered reaction of the company. The Lord had to say something to quieten them, to persuade them of His gracious intentions, before speaking the words in the next verses. These disciples needed peace to still their immediate panic and to reassure their hearts, for all of them had deserted their Master. This is one glorious part of the resurrection message. He comes in person to those who had failed. It is this that caused Peter to speak of the resurrection as bringing him to a new and living hope (1 Pet. 1:3ff). It is this meeting with a living Jesus we should look forward to every Sunday when we go to Church. He is there amongst His people, as the living Lord and glorious King (Rev. 1:10-20).

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### **24:38-40**

It is no use trying to "spiritualise" away the resurrection. It is a bodily resurrection as Jesus took pains to point out, and it was Jesus "himself" who came amongst them, as Luke, the doctor, an accurate man, took care to emphasise. The Jesus we have now, by faith, is not a "lesser" Jesus than the One who walked this world with the disciples long ago. It is a "greater" Jesus, for He is no longer limited physically and the works He does and the works His disciples are to do are greater works (John 14:12). Now these thoughts must have stirred the disciples and caused them to reach out in faith towards the possibilities inherent for them in the resurrection. Part of Jesus' purpose in calling them to "touch and see," was to reassure them that it was really Himself, and not a figment of imagination nor a projection of their own secret hopes. But it was also an appeal to these disciples to be realistic in their dealing with spiritual and holy things. If some of us used our heads a bit more, rather than being swayed by emotions, we would fare better. But there is also here a wonderful condescension on the part of the Saviour. It is amazing how He comes down to our feeble, uncertain level in order to reassure us! This is the Jesus who is still with us.

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### 24:41-43

The subject here is "joy", and we could go over the whole chapter again to trace the gradual awakening of joy in the disciples' hearts. It was gradual, and that is an important lesson. Thunderbolts of intense emotion can be very dangerous, spiritually as well as psychologically, to some personalities more than others. Here Luke points out that the sheer volume and potency of their joy in fact militated against their faith. "They still disbelieved for joy," (RSV). It would be wrong to quench joy, for it was partly joy in believing that sent the two disciples on the return journey from Emmaus. But on the other hand it is wrong to allow the emotion of joy to operate in an undisciplined way. It must be channelled and harnessed, else it will dissipate itself and accomplish nothing except subjective thrill. Excessive emotion is always a danger to vital faith, because by it we tend to become preoccupied with the inward feeling rather than the outward facts which generate the feeling and which ought to lead to action. Indeed, an excessive interest in "joy", detached from the realities of life in Christ, can become a sickness and lead to weakness and lack of spiritual growth, because we become too concerned with producing a repetition of the experience of "joy". Remember, even in (indeed especially in) the high moments of spiritual experience there is a Devil waiting to deceive and distract.

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### 24:41-43

There is a lesson to be learned here from our Lord's action in eating a meal with His disciples. It seems Jesus' intention here is that, by the sheer naturalness of so sharing a common occasion with His own, He might begin to break down the barriers of tension and uncertainty. Far from quenching their joy this action stabilised it and enlivened it and brought a deep persuasion to their hearts concerning the resurrection and presence of their Lord. Jesus did not need human food in order to maintain the life of a glorified body but there is no deceit whatever in His action. Have we not all at times taken a cup of tea or a meal which was not really needed in order to put others at ease? Have we not found that a cup of tea in the church hall on a Sunday evening has made it easier to invite visitors to join us and easier to initiate conversation? Do not let us be too "spiritual" in our ideas of Christian service. If you have a home, use it to welcome people; not to "give them the Gospel", as if you were to belabour them with a big stick, but to be nice to them, kind and human, like Jesus. But what about witness? Do you doubt the presence of Jesus? He loves such occasions and uses them to bless His people.

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### 24:44

Before studying the last section of this fascinating chapter, take time to read the classic chapter on the resurrection, 1 Cor. 15, not least to see how comprehensively it deals with the subject in its various sections, which we give now as an aid to private study.

1 Corinthians 15:

|   |         |                                  |
|---|---------|----------------------------------|
| v | 1 - 7   | Resurrection and Historical Fact |
|   | 8 - 11  | " " Personal Experience          |
|   | 12 - 19 | " " The Gospel                   |
|   | 20 - 28 | " " The Purposes of God          |
|   | 29 - 34 | " " Conduct                      |
|   | 35 - 49 | " " The New Body                 |
|   | 50 - 58 | " " Final Victory                |

A simpler division is to refer to the resurrection in terms of a fact of history, a fact of faith, and a fact of experience. The whole Gospel of the Resurrection undergirds and gives dynamic to both life and service. We can be steadfast, unmoveable and abounding in the Lord's work because by the resurrection we know our labour is not in vain in the Lord, even if at any given time it seems as if death has conquered.

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### 24:44-45

Luke now brings his record of the Gospel to a swift conclusion, having no doubt already resolved to write his sequel to the Gospel in the Acts of the Apostles, in which the opening verses provide the linking theme of the

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words and works of the risen Christ Acts 1:1-14). Luke was quite sure that what he was recording here at the end of the Gospel narrative was only the beginning of the glorious story of Christ, which story is still being written. In many ways we have here the introduction to or the preparation for the preaching and teaching ministry of the disciples and the principles shown are fundamental. In v.44 the meaning is, "These things that have happened, My life, death and resurrection, which things you have witnessed, are the realisation in actual history of all that was predicted concerning Me in the Old Testament, concerning which things I taught you while you accompanied with Me." How gloriously the Bible makes it plain that the Cross was not in any sense an accident but the climax of a perfect plan towards which history had moved resolutely from the dawning of time. Perhaps now the disciples realised, as we must realise concerning our own lives and service, that they were "timely actors in a drama of destiny," being worked out in their day. No day's experience can ever be thought of as incidental or irrelevant if we think in such categories as these. To be caught up into divine and eternal purposes is a marvellous privilege and responsibility as the epistles of the New Testament make clear. Read Ephesians 1:3-12; 2:1-7; 1 Pet. 1:3-12, and begin to understand why the apostolic church throbbed with life.

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### 24:44-45

The excitement, thrill and conviction which marked the early church was not a subjective thing, nor was it generated by any emotional or spiritual conditioning. It had its roots and power in the Scriptures. This is very important, especially in our day when "experience" tends to displace Scripture as the ultimate authority. For example, while it is quite in order to sing the Easter chorus, "He lives .... Christ Jesus lives today," it is not sufficient to sing, "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart." Our personal experience of Christ is not the ultimate authentication of the Resurrection and it must not be made so! Christ lives, risen from the dead, and this we believe by the authentication of the facts of history recorded in Scripture. But it is one thing to know the Scriptures and another thing to understand them. Pride, prejudice and love of the world blind *our* minds, as they did with the disciples, so that we read words but do not grasp the meaning. An enlightenment of the understanding is needed (1 Cor. 2:10-14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4) and this is what the Saviour did for His disciples by the Holy Spirit. As a result they grasped what is one of the most important lessons to be learned, namely that it is the death of Christ on the Cross that holds the whole of the Scriptures in one glorious unity. There is one message from beginning to end of the Bible, and it is Christ.

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### 24:44-45

Bishop Ryle has wise comments to make before we leave these two verses: "We are not to suppose that the Bible is a book which no ordinary person can expect to comprehend; we are simply to understand that Jesus showed His disciples the full meaning of many passages which had hitherto been hid from their eyes .... He that desires to understand the Bible with profit, must first ask the Lord Jesus to open the eyes of his understanding by the Holy Ghost ..... A humble and prayerful spirit will find a thousand things in the Bible, which the proud self-conceited student will utterly fail to discern." Ryle, in a further note, quotes Poole: "He did not open their understanding without the Scriptures: he sends them thither. He knows that Scripture would not give them a sufficient knowledge of the things of God without the influence and illumination of His Spirit. They are truly taught by God who are taught by His Spirit to understand the Scriptures. Christ gives great honour to the Scriptures. The Devil cheats those whom he persuades to cast away the Scriptures in expectation of a teaching by the Spirit. The Spirit teaches by, not without, nor contrary to, the holy Scriptures." These are important words and their practical import in the work of evangelism is seen in such passages as Acts 17:1-3, 10-11; 18:11 (during which time Paul wrote the letter to the Romans and we can assume his preaching was of the same substance); Acts 20:27-32; 2 Tim. 2:1-2, 15; 3:14 - 4:5. The Scriptural Christ and Christ in all the Scriptures must be our message, and to this the Holy Spirit will bear witness and the Lord will add to the church those that are being saved.

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## 24:46-47

The inevitability of the sufferings of Christ is testified to by all Scripture, as is His Resurrection. We cannot fail to see the determination of God as we look on the Lamb of God slain, and in consequence we must learn to glory in the Cross of Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14). The message of that Cross (47) concerns the necessity of repentance and the possibility of remission of sins in the name of or by the authority of Christ. This is the message that is to be heralded far and wide (Acts 5:30-32; 11:15-18; 20:20-21; 26:20). In the preaching of it the apostles without question believed that the message itself carried the dynamic of God's grace, whereby men and women were enabled to believe, to turn from their sins and to be assured of forgiveness. There is a glorious element of the miraculous in the business of preaching the Gospel. The dead hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear live (John 5:24-29). Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:8-21), and it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Cor. 1:17-18, 21-25). But there is also a solemn element in the heralding of the good news of Christ for it can be to some a message of death and judgment rather than life and peace (2 Cor. 2:15-16; Heb. 4:1-2). Little wonder Jesus warned us to be careful with what attitude of heart we attend to the Word of God (Lk. 8:18). But one thing is sure: we must never have doubts as to the authenticity or authority or dynamic of the message we preach, nor must we ever despair of the circumstances in which we preach it. The disciples were told to start preaching at Jerusalem, the very heart of anti-Christ activity, and the Acts of the Apostles records the issue of faith on the part of some and ever increasing unbelief and enmity on the part of others. What a calling!

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## 24:48

What a calling; what a responsibility, and what a privilege were given to these disciples who had so recently been such failures and in such desolation of heart. They were to be the witnesses to all these things; that is, they were to bear witness or testify to the facts of the message of the Gospel. They were not required to produce the results, for that is God's province alone (1 Cor. 3:5-7) nor were they to fall into the dangerous trap of trying to generate appropriate feelings in their hearers or themselves, for that is exceedingly artificial, not to say harmful. It is the truth that does the work and it needs no helpful manipulation from men (Isa. 55:8-11). The task of the witness is to "let loose" the Word of God and then to get out of the way and leave it alone to get on with its work. God will honour His own word and will honour nothing else (1 Kings 8:1-11). Of course no true witness will ever handle the message of the Cross with that kind of detachment that is casual and indifferent, as if all that was needed was oratory or enthusiasm. A witness, as the Greek word signifies, is essentially a martyr, one who gives up his life. This is the essence of true witnessing in the Gospel. It is the dying of a death that others might live (John 3:28-30; Matt. 27:42). Our lives will preach Christ, or self; they cannot preach both.

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## 24:49

Be careful not to build a doctrine of the Holy Spirit on this verse alone and be clear that it speaks of empowerment for service in proclamation of the Gospel rather than of subjective experience. With a commission such as they had just received, and having regard to the stress of the experiences they had been through, in which their misery had been turned to joy by the fact of the resurrection, there would be a tendency in the disciples to barge on into this glorious service in a show of carnal confidence. This verse counsels caution. Decisiveness in Christian service is a necessity, but rush is seldom if ever of God. All who would serve in the Gospel must be permanently persuaded that in and by themselves they are nothing, have nothing and can do nothing (John 15:1-5). "All the spiritual equipment that we need, He gives us through the Spirit, already given to His church in His fulness on that first Pentecost and to every believer in the moment of regeneration. And now there rests on every regenerate man and woman the responsibility of being so completely surrendered to Him and of so looking up to Him in faith and obedience, that He will from moment to moment equip us with His divine strength for the task to which we have been called." (Geldenhuys). The faithful God who called us will do it!

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### **24:50-53**

This must have been a tremendous experience for the disciples following on the words of promise in v.49. The risen and victorious Christ led them out and, having given them their marching orders at the start of a new and glorious crusade, He lifted up His hands in blessing, benediction and commissioning. In the very act of blessing He was parted from them. These men would never forget, and every time they preached or suffered they would recall that Jesus their Lord was eager, willing and able to bless them and keep them and make them a blessing to all. They had failed, and they knew it; they had been slow to understand and to believe He was alive and victorious; by the narrowness of their own thinking and the poverty of their expectations they had limited in their own hearts the glory of the Gospel and consequently had virtually brought their service to a premature end. But this would be no more. Although they would no longer have His visible presence the disciples would have the promised endowment with power for service by the Holy Spirit. All that this means is of course elaborated in the opening chapters of Acts and we state simply that the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit is seen there to be for, and in the interest of, the preaching of the Gospel. Pentecost came, the promised Spirit was given (Isa. 44:1-3; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14ff.), and the men who had waited, as they were commanded, were empowered to preach. Do not build a doctrine of "waiting" for the Spirit on this unique happening but ask rather whether or not God can trust you with power to do His holy service.

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### **24:50-53**

Read Luke's fuller account of this historical event in Acts 1:1-14. For forty days the disciples had been instructed by the risen Lord, about whose real presence they no longer had any doubts. On Easter Sunday He had risen from the dead with a glorified body, a real man, and now, as a real man He was to be exalted to the right hand of the Father in power and glory. We are pointed here to the eternal manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ and we must not think in lesser terms than these. This man, our great High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, has entered the presence of God for us, and ever lives to make intercession for us and to plead our cause at God's right hand (John 14:2; 17:5, 11-19, 24; Heb. 6:19-20; 7:24-25; 9:24; 1 John 2;1; Rom. 8:28-39). "Christ dying on the cross for sinners, Christ living in heaven to intercede, Christ coming again in glory, are three great objects which ought to stand out prominently before the eyes of every true Christian." (Ryle). When they do, we begin to understand the joy and the dynamic of these disciples as they went out to their commissioned service.

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### **24:50-53**

Technically speaking we see here that the disciples were blessed, thrilled and dynamised in terms of discipleship before the actual outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is not surprising since the Spirit's appointed function at all times and in all ages is to testify to and convict concerning the things of Christ. Think of the words in 1 Peter 1:10-12 concerning the operations of the Spirit in the Old Testament prophets and recall Jesus' own words to the disciples in John 14:16-18; 15:26-27; 16:7-15. Is it not true to say that the Holy Spirit was right then quickening the hearts of these men and enlivening their spirits as they recalled the truths they had been taught? There seems to have been such a spirit of "enabling" operating in their hearts that they did not mourn the departure of their Master but worshipped Him as they had never done during His earthly sojourn with them. Peter was undoubtedly impressed very deeply, for he spoke out of that experience in 1 Peter 1:3-9. Without question it was the impact of the dawning of truth that filled the disciples with joy and hope. This makes us sense even more than before the potency and earnestness of Jesus' rebuke to His own concerning their unbelief (24:25-27). There is no excuse for unbelief, and that besetting sin robs us of untold joy and peace. Let the facts of Christ's finished work lay hold on our hearts and let us realise that we are the ones chosen now to go and tell the whole world.

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### **24:50-53**

Note the transformation of these men and women. They went back to Jerusalem, into the heart of the enemies' camp, fully aware of what would befall them because Christ had foretold their sufferings, but they were not



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dismayed or deterred. Nor were they secretive or ashamed, for they went to the Temple which, although desecrated and prostituted by decadent religion, was still the House of God. Perhaps they were aware that they, and not the unbelieving Pharisees, were the true people of God. This being so, why should they hide themselves or be apologetic for their faith? Of course they were not stupidly or arrogantly antagonistic, for the simple reason that their hearts were fixed on God (53). To be taken up with God and not men is of the very essence of true and fruitful service. Look forward into the Acts of the Apostles and trace the costly service rendered by these early saints (Acts 3:1-4,33; 5:12-42). It was not easy. The story tells of riots as well as revival and of suffering as well as persecution. But all through the story the abiding note is that of the assurance and joy of a believing church. Little wonder they turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Is there any reason why this glorious Christ should not do the same again through us? At one time there was little sign of the disciples ever being of use to God on this level, but it is amazing what God can do with lives given up to Him. The best is yet to be. The future is ours, because it is Christ's (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

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