

Shepherding Notes

Luke

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Today marks a monumental shift in our reading. When we were studying Isaiah, we were learning about Jesus Christ. But now, as we turn our eyes to the gospel of Luke, we see Jesus manifested in the flesh. Luke provides a glorious look at the person and work of the Savior.

Getting to Know Luke

Luke is the most prolific author in the New Testament. His gospel is the longest by word count, and when you include Acts, Luke authored about 28% of the New Testament. Luke was a Greek believer who traveled with Paul in his missionary journeys. He was a physician by trade. However, as is often true with the well-learned Greeks, he was a master of a variety of skills. It is clear from the structure of both Luke and Acts that Luke was a student of history — his format directly correlates to the famous Greek and Roman histories like Xenophon, Herodotus, Thucydides, and even Josephus. You can see from his introduction that Luke has "undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us," receiving this information from "eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word."

Most scholars agree that Mary is the likely eyewitness source of the first few chapters, which would explain how we see into Mary's heart so personally. Consider these three verses:

Luke 1:29 — "But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be." (Here you see into the mind of Mary as she sought discernment.)

Luke 2:19 — "But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." (Here you are given a view into the heart of Mary.)

Luke 2:51 — "And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart." (Once again, an editorial note about the mind and heart of Mary.)

Why highlight this? Because it is important to remember that the gospels are not just a bunch of stories haphazardly slapped together without rhyme or reason. They are certainly not conjecture or hearsay. This "orderly account" was written so that we might "have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." Every word of this gospel was divinely orchestrated for our edification. God wants to use this book to help you to

know Jesus as He really is.

Written for a Roman Audience

Matthew wrote primarily to a Jewish audience. Mark wrote primarily to a broader Greek audience. John addressed his account to "the world." Luke wrote to a Roman audience. As you read it, keep an eye out for the emphasis on the following themes:

- God's ultimate power shared only within the Godhead. This is a direct rebuke of Roman polytheism.

- God's sovereign rule over all of history. The Romans loved history and viewed various eras as ruled by various deities. Trust in Christ necessarily upends that.

- God's authority over earthly rulers. Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees, the High Priest, and Pilate are all powerful enemies overcome by Jesus.

- The upside-down kingdom of God. Luke highlights the exaltation of the humble and the humiliation of the powerful — a direct repudiation of society's inverted understanding of values.

- Jesus as Lord. Luke refers to Jesus as Lord more than any other gospel author. If you combine Luke and Acts, it adds up to over 150 occasions — a direct repudiation of the common Roman declaration, "Caesar is Lord."

Luke 2 is likely the most famous chapter in the entire gospel. It contains a plethora of details about the early life of Christ found exclusively in this book. Today we are going to move past the familiar birth narrative and set our attention on the one and only narrative we have of Jesus between about age two and age thirty. Luke 2:41–52 is the only information we have about what Jesus was like before He started His earthly ministry.

Parallel to Samuel

vs. 52

Consider how Jesus is described in Luke 2:52: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." There is only one other place in the Bible where a similar description is given of a young boy. 1 Samuel 2:26 says, "Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man."

Parallel to John the Baptist

vs. 40

The final verse of Luke 1 tells us about John the Baptist's childhood: "And the child grew and became strong in spirit..." We find a very similar line about Jesus in Luke 2:40: "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom."

Ordinary / Extraordinary

One of the most fascinating things about these parallels is that Jesus' childhood was, in many ways, that of a very ordinary boy. There is no indication that Jesus ever did anything miraculous as a child. In this story about getting left behind by His parents, Jesus displays wisdom, but He does not do anything heroic, bombastic, or supernatural.

Of course, it is true that Jesus was not like any other child in the history of the world. He did not have a sin nature. He never disobeyed His parents. He never had to be told to do something more than once. He always joyfully obeyed all the way, right away. In that way Jesus was extraordinary. But the God of heaven came down and humbled Himself to the point of living in obscurity with an impoverished family in a backwater village called Nazareth. And even though He is the Son of God incarnate, Jesus still humbly submitted Himself to His earthly, fallen, sinful parents.

"Verse 51 highlights this massive truth with this simple little phrase: 'and He was submissive to them.' This is true humility on display. God made low to raise us up."

"My Father"

vs. 49

What sets Jesus apart from Samuel and John is that He was not only a man. Jesus is also fully God — the doctrine known as the hypostatic union of Christ. These are the only words we have from Jesus as a child: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (vs. 49)

Did you catch what He said? Jesus referred to the Temple as "my Father's house." There are a grand total of zero people in the Bible leading up to this point who ever referred to God as "my Father." In the Old Testament the people of Israel referred to God on occasion as "our Father." But to claim that God was His Father was to claim equality with God Himself. Don't take my word for it — listen to how the Pharisees responded to Jesus when He made this same statement later in His life. John 5:17-18 says, "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.' This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." Even as a child, Jesus was declaring that He was the Son of God, equal to the Father.

There has been a concerted effort over the past two hundred years by the academic elites of our era to undermine the credibility of the Bible by denying that it is historical. How could anyone read the first few verses of Luke 3 and claim the Bible doesn't intend to be historical? Luke outlines every governmental official who ruled over Israel in any way during that time, even telling us it was during the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign that these things took place. The Bible still stands as the most accurate collection of history ever recorded.

Notice what happens to John. We are told that "the word of God came to John..." That is the very way we are introduced to many of the prophets of the Old Testament. John is the last prophet of the Old Testament era — the final voice pointing to the one who would be the hinge of history. His message? "A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Paul helps explain it further in Acts 19:4: "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." His message of baptism was always intended to point people to Jesus.

A Brood of Vipers

Luke draws from Isaiah to inform us that John is the one foretold who would be a voice crying in the wilderness. A group of religious people came out to receive his baptism. Instead of baptizing them, John saw through their veneer and called them out. He calls them a brood of vipers and demands repentance as a prerequisite for baptism. He then anticipates their response — he knew their go-to move was to claim righteousness by nature of their genealogy. "And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."

The Axe at the Root

Do you remember the last time this "axe at the root of the tree" metaphor was used in the Bible? It was when the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a giant tree representing himself. A holy watcher came down from heaven and cried, "Chop down the tree and lop off its branches..." Nebuchadnezzar's stump was spared and the tree regrew — a symbolic humbling and restoring of that ancient king. But that is not how John concludes his warning to these religious people. He tells them the branches that are cut off will be burned. This is the very sermon Jesus picks up on in John 15 when He says that those who do not abide in Him will be cut off and thrown into the fire.

"God is calling us to true repentance. If we claim to believe in Jesus, it requires that our lives will be transformed. As John Owen famously said, 'Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.'"

Today we are going to set our focus on the first 13 verses of Luke 4. In order to do this, we need to remember a few things about Satan.

Satan and Jesus Are Not Equal Opposites

Sometimes modern Christian authors speak about Jesus and Satan almost as if they are yin and yang. In doing so, they supremely underestimate the power and authority and holiness of Jesus, and grievously overestimate the role of Satan in the scope of God's sovereign plan. As we see in this passage, Satan has no chance when battling Jesus.

Satan May Be Powerful, but He Is Not That Creative

If you pay attention, you will see that Satan's approach to tempting Jesus was the same format as the temptation of Eve — just on an exponentially grander scale.

Satan Is Not Omniscient, Omnipresent, or Omnipotent

Omniscience means to know everything. That describes only one being in the universe — God Himself. We have no indication from Scripture that Satan knows anything about the future except that which has been specifically prophesied by God in the Bible. It is possible that Satan did not know whether Jesus was the Messiah at this point. This may be why Satan begins the conversation with the phrase, "If you are the Son of God..." Satan gave Jesus His best shot, and Jesus still came out victorious. In doing so, it would have been perfectly clear to Satan that Jesus is the Son of God.

Satan Did Have Some Level of Dominion Before the Cross

I want to be very careful here not to give the devil more due than Scripture does. But as you read the temptation when Satan promises to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, how can he make such a claim? Consider the following passages:

- 2 Cor. 4:3-4 — "...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."
 - John 12:31 — "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out."
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- Eph. 6:12 – "'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness.'"
- Col. 2:15 – "'He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.'"

Satan is the "god of this world" and the "ruler of this world." He did have some level of authority to deceive the nations and spiritually enslave the world. But just as Jesus said to Pilate, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." Satan was temporarily given the ability to have a form of rule, but the war was over as soon as Jesus was raised from the dead.

"The church is not an army that needs to invade to procure victory. The church is an occupation force for the warrior who already claimed the victory."

Satan Left Him Until an Opportune Time

vs. 13

There has been much debate about when exactly Luke is referencing with the words "an opportune time." It could be speaking about when Satan influenced the mind of Peter to demand that Jesus circumvent the cross (Matthew 16:23). Maybe it is speaking about Satan's entrance into Judas in Luke 22:3. Maybe it is a reference to the cross itself – where Satan thought he was going to be victorious over Jesus, only to find out that the very way he was seeking to destroy God was the exact plan God used to destroy Satan. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8)

Luke 5 contains one of my favorite miracles of Jesus in verses 17–26. A paralytic was given assistance by his friends to reach Jesus so that he might be healed. They refused to give up when the crowds were thick. They literally tore a hole in the roof and lowered their friend down to Jesus. The result: Jesus healed their friend. However, Luke does not put the focus on the man who was healed, or on his friends. All of the focus is on the power of Jesus to save, and the unbelief of those who were standing around.

Fixing the Big Problem

Did you notice that Jesus' first course of action was not to heal the man, but to forgive his sins? Jesus looked right past the temporal need and took care of the man's greater, eternal need. This declaration was immediately met with unbelief as the scribes and Pharisees began to say, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Here is the question: are they right? Of course they are! Because our sins are directed at God, He is the only one who is able to forgive them. (See Psalm 51:4)

Which Is Easier to Say?

Jesus was able to perceive their hearts. He addressed their doubt head on by asking a brilliant question: "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?" Notice that Jesus did not ask which is easier to do. He asked which is easier to say. The simple answer is that it is much easier to say that someone's sins are forgiven — because there is no way on earth to test it. They can never say "rise and walk" because they can't heal people. Clearly, it is easier to say that your sins are forgiven.

"...That You May Know..."

Jesus continued: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — and then He said to the paralytic — "Rise, pick up your bed and go home." The reason for the healing was to reveal that Jesus also has power to forgive. No priest, no pastor, no person in this world can forgive you of your sins. The scribes and Pharisees were exactly right — only God can forgive. What they were missing was the fact that Jesus is God. Jesus is able to forgive your sin, not just because He can ignore it, but because He paid for it at the cross.

They Glorified God and Were Filled with Awe

Luke is revealing the proper response to having our sins forgiven. The people who were in that room left saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today." They were filled with awe that Jesus was able to heal. Are you filled with awe that Jesus was able to forgive you? Does your jaw still drop at the extravagant nature of His grace? Or have you gotten overly used to the idea that your sins have been washed away? The proper response of the Christian should be to daily give glory to God with a heart filled with awe and amazement at the extremity of His love for you. Awe is the only appropriate response to that kind of power and love.

Here in Luke 6 we find a sermon known as "the Sermon on the Plain." You will likely recognize that it occasionally parallels the famous "Sermon on the Mount" found in Matthew 5-7. It should not surprise us that Jesus repeated some of His preaching material as He traveled and encountered new crowds who had not yet heard His message. Today we will examine the portion of this sermon most often taken out of context: vs. 37-38.

Our American culture has devolved to a point where almost any immoral conduct is accepted or even praised. The chief sin that has arisen in our culture's backwards religion is tolerance at all costs. Don't judge others. It is relatively common for an unbeliever to respond to a call to repentance with, "Doesn't your own Bible tell you not to judge me?"

What "Judge Not" Does Not Mean

"Judge not" does not mean that we are never to call anyone out for their sins. In fact, the Bible regularly tells us to be discerning about others. The book of Jude is an extended argument to look at the words and conduct of teachers to discern if they are false. Discernment is a form of judgment. Jesus Himself highlighted this kind of character judgment when He exposed the Pharisees and scribes for their wickedness. Furthermore, we are actually taught by Jesus in Matthew 18 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 that we are sinning if we do not judge the misconduct of others in the church and approach them with a heart of gentle correction. "Judge not" is not a command to accept or overlook sin.

What "Judge Not" Does Mean

"Judge not" is a stark warning against being a faultfinder. Have you ever seen "gotcha journalism"? There was a person doing their best to make the one being interviewed look foolish. That is the kind of heart Jesus was condemning in these verses — a heart that desires to stand in arrogant judgment over others.

There are occasions when we are commanded to judge others, but we are always to do so circumspectly, humbly, and graciously. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." (Gal. 6:1-2) Notice that this kind of judgment is done for the good of the person who has sinned. It is done with the goal of restoration, not rejection.

"If you are judging others without a full awareness that you are also a sinner who needs the grace of God, then your judgment will be filled with prideful disdain rather than humble compassion."

Luke 7 contains three miracles that are designed to reveal that the power of Jesus is far more extreme than anyone could have imagined. Look at how each one of these miracles, in its own way, reveals that Jesus' power is not restrained or limited in any way.

Power Over Disease — Regardless of Distance

We come first to the Centurion — a Roman, but an honorable man with great faith in Jesus. As Jesus was approaching the man's home to heal the servant, the Centurion sent messengers to say, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." In those days, a Jew who entered the house of a Roman soldier would become ceremonially defiled. This Centurion understood that Jesus was holy, and that he was not. He viewed Jesus as too holy to enter his home — so he asked Jesus to heal his servant from a distance. Jesus, marveling at this man's faith, healed the servant. Geography is not a barrier for Jesus. Jesus has complete power over disease, regardless of distance.

Power Over Death

The second miracle highlights the extremity of Jesus' power over death. Jesus timed His travel to arrive at the gates of a tiny town called Nain at the exact same moment a funeral procession was coming out to bury a young man. The first words Jesus uttered were to the mother of the deceased: "Do not weep." Under any normal funeral circumstances, that is a very strange command. But He was not just going to tell her to stop weeping — He was also going to take away her reason for weeping. Jesus commanded that young man to arise, and life immediately entered his body. Whatever He says, goes. If He looks at a dead man and tells him to sit up, life immediately returns. Jesus has complete power over death.

Power to Forgive Every Sinner

At the bottom of the chapter we see once again that Jesus' power is not limited. We are introduced to a sinful woman who came to a party uninvited to see Jesus. The owner, Simon, was furious. Jesus welcomed her. Jesus then told Simon a parable about a moneylender who forgave one person of a small debt and another of a great debt. The moneylender was equally able to forgive both debts. In other words, Jesus can forgive even the greatest of sinners. There is no boundary to His grace. This is even better news

than Jesus' power over disease and death and distance.

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name! His power over disease, death, and distance is extraordinary – but His power to forgive sinners of every kind is the most glorious of all."

Faith is very important. According to Hebrews 11:6, without faith it is impossible to please God. However, the word faith has been kidnapped by our modern English vernacular to refer to something it was never intended to mean in the Bible. True biblical faith has four parts.

1. COGNITION

You must first hear the good news before you can have faith. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) Nobody will ever be saved apart from first hearing the gospel message.

2. CONFIRMATION

Someone must agree with or accept the core tenets of the faith. They must believe in the historical existence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of a virgin, who died in place of sinners, and who rose again to live forever as our King. However, there will be many people who agree to the veracity of these truths, yet will end up in hell. Faith is more than intellectual assent.

3. CONFIDENCE

In order to have true faith, you must have an active trust in God. Friedrich Nietzsche defined faith this way: "Faith is not wanting to know what is true." That is essentially the exact opposite of what genuine faith is. True faith is built on the fact that God is a person who has made promises that we can trust. As I write this, I am sitting in a chair. I sit here with confidence because I know that the chair will hold me up. I am believing in its actual abilities. I trust it. True faith is knowing God and trusting Him.

4. CONFORMATION

Not confirm, but conform. True faith always results in a lifestyle of obedience. Yes, you will keep sinning. But you will experience progressive sanctification. Real faith results in a change of heart and a change of life.

Faith on Display

Now let's see these things on display in the life of the woman in this chapter who touched the hem of Jesus' garment. She is not being superstitious. She is actually displaying genuine faith. Let's look for the signs:

- Cognition: Mark 5:27 tells us that she had heard many reports about Jesus.

- Confirmation: She went against societal rules to go into a crowd in order to get near to Jesus. She would never have risked this if she didn't believe the stories.

- Confidence: She is so confident in the power of Jesus that she says, "I don't even have to touch Him — I simply have to touch the hem of his garment."

- Conformation: In the Bible, genuine faith starts with hearing and becomes action. When Jesus asked "Who touched me?" she came forward in fear and trembling to acknowledge her actions. In doing this, Jesus gave her the opportunity to display her faith to the entire crowd.

This woman has genuine faith and Jesus commends it in vs. 48.

There are three small portions of this chapter that are exclusive to Luke's gospel. We are going to take a brief glimpse at each one.

Transfiguration Conversation

VS. 31-32

The transfiguration is one of the most significant events in the gospels. All four accounts present it as a high point in the ministry of Christ — everything from this point forward is a high-speed journey to the cross. No other gospel account tells us what Jesus spoke about with Moses and Elijah. Luke alone reveals that He "spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

His "departure" that He was about to accomplish was His death. Jesus was preaching the gospel of the cross to Moses and Elijah — informing Moses that His death would deliver His people and bring them into the true Promised Land; informing Elijah that He would turn the hearts of sinners to the Father. What a conversation that must have been.

"Jesus was preaching the gospel of the cross to Moses and Elijah — proclaiming His purpose and what He would accomplish at Jerusalem."

Fire From Heaven

VS. 51-56

In this section the disciples become offended on Jesus' behalf and ask if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy the inhospitable Samaritans. But the more interesting point is that the narrative opens by saying that Jesus had "set his face to go to Jerusalem." The narrative also explains that the reason Jesus was rejected by the Samaritans was "because his face was set toward Jerusalem." This is likely a reference to the servant song in Isaiah 50 where the coming Messiah King would "set my face like flint." The Samaritans understood that He was going to Jerusalem to become their King — and they hated the idea. Of course they were right, but not in the way they expected. He was not going to become an enemy King. He was going to become a Savior King for Jews, Samaritans, and every other tribe, tongue, and nation.

Hand to the Plow

vs. 61-62

The last of the three exclusive passages concerns a man who wanted to go back home and say farewell before following Jesus. This may be an intentional parallel to Elisha's call to serve alongside Elijah. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah approached Elisha while he was plowing a field. Elisha asked to go back and kiss his father and mother — and he went. But consider what else he did: "He returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him."

Like Cortés who burned the ships, or like the disciples who left their nets, Elisha burned his exit strategy to the ground. Jesus read the heart of the man in Luke 9 and knew he had one foot in and one foot out. He wasn't sold on following Jesus with his whole heart. Where is your heart? Have you set in your heart to leave everything else behind to follow Jesus? Or do you have one foot in and one foot out? Set your hand to the work of serving Christ and don't look back.

Luke 9:51–19:27 is often referred to as "the travel narratives" or "the travel sermons." This section is probably best known for its parables — there are 16 distinct parables in this section of Luke. Our focus today is on the parable of the Good Samaritan, found in verses 25–37.

The First Question

vs. 25

Verse 25 begins by identifying the motives of the lawyer who asks two questions to Jesus. He was not there to learn from Him. The lawyer was there to "test" Him. As was His custom when being attacked, Jesus responded with a question. He asked the lawyer how he understood the writings of Scripture, and the man gave the right answer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus told him, "Do this and you will live."

The Second Question

vs. 29

Being a lawyer, he pressed further in his attempt to trap Jesus by asking, "Who is my neighbor?" It is a profound philosophical question. How far does my love for others need to reach? He was attempting to complicate the meaning of the law so that he could find a loophole. Jesus answers by telling a story — but the main character of the story, the Jewish man who would symbolically represent the lawyer, is never told who his neighbor is. Rather, the answer given is who proved to be a neighbor through their actions.

The Point

The point of this story is not "be nicer to people." Jesus is answering the question, "Who is my neighbor?" What was the lawyer searching for with his question? He was looking for criteria by which he could exclude people from his love. Consider the two men who passed by the bleeding man — a priest and a Levite. Both were of the same nationality as the dying man. Both had religious duties to care for the souls of that battered man. Yet both of them asked themselves the question, "Is that bloody mess of a man down there really my neighbor?" — and because they used that question to justify their sin, they could walk on by.

Look again at verse 29. What was the lawyer trying to do by asking his question? It says, "But he, desiring to justify himself..." You can justify any sin against any person if you simply convince yourself that they are not your neighbor.

- If you convince yourself that a person on the other side of your office or a screen is not your neighbor, you can justify lust and indulge in pornography instead of properly loving the souls of those people.
- If you convince yourself that the child on the other side of a woman's skin is not really human, you can justify killing it instead of loving it.
- If you convince yourself that someone from the other side of the tracks, a border, a language barrier, or of a different race is not your neighbor, you can justify prejudice, mistreatment, mockery, or injustice.

"Don't justify your sin. Don't muddy the clear waters of God's commands. Love God – love others. Which others? Whichever ones the Lord places in your path that you are capable of loving."

Notice that the Good Samaritan helped at great cost to himself. Jesus gave much more than that. He gave up the riches of heaven, His comfort on earth, and His own life that He might be a good neighbor who loves us. "You go, and do likewise."

True Blessedness

VS. 27-28

There was a woman in the crowd listening to Jesus who called out a declaration that Jesus' mother was blessed. She was not wrong about that. If you remember back in Luke 1:42, Elizabeth saw Mary and cried out, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" A few verses later in Mary's song of praise, she said of herself, "For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed." (Luke 1:48)

However, Jesus does not simply affirm her declaration. Why not? Was she wrong about Mary being blessed? Absolutely not! The problem was with the exclusive nature of the blessing. This woman was limiting Jesus' ability to be a blessing to those whom He was biologically related. Jesus is not rebuking her, but He is helping her to widen her understanding. Anyone who hears the Word of God and keeps it — responds in obedience — is blessed. Christian, if you want to experience true blessedness, you need to receive the Word of God with an ear to hear and a heart to obey.

"If there was ever a time for Jesus to teach someone the 'Hail Mary' prayer, it was right here. But the glory never goes to her, nor is she ever found to be the object of prayer. She was a wonderful woman of God — but she was just like you and me, a sinner who needed Jesus to save her."

True Cleansing

VS. 37-41

The Pharisees in Jesus' day had an incredibly complex system of ceremonial washings they would expect of any "holy" or "religious" person. Jesus, however, did not wash before eating this meal. This was not a matter of germs or hygiene — in the mind of a Pharisee, this was a spiritual matter. They had produced a myriad of rules that God never sanctioned. So Jesus intentionally caused this man to be shocked so that He could prove a point. What was the point? Simply this: Who cares if your hands are clean if your heart is not. Or as Jesus put it, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the

outside make the inside also?"

Jesus was preaching at this moment to a group of highly religious, morally upright, pious people. They were hyper-focused on their religious image. But they were not concerned with truly knowing the Lord. What about you? Are you being hypocritical like the Pharisees, only caring what people on this earth think of you? Are you wearing a mask when you come to church?

"Give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you." God isn't pleased with your stuff. He wants you — your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

There are 43 unique parables in the gospels. Luke has more parables than any other book with 28. Most of the parables in Luke fit into the "travel narratives" section we are walking through right now. Today we are going to look at just one of them, often referred to as the "Parable of the Rich Fool."

If Jesus was to ask one of the people in the crowd which book of the Bible to go to in order to learn how not to be a fool, they would have all answered, "Proverbs." The man in the parable of Luke 12:13–21 followed the pattern of the book of Proverbs in terms of worldly things. He made himself wealthy and capable of a nice retirement. But God calls this man a fool. Don't move past that too quickly. God calls this wealthy, respectable man who was ready to retire — a fool. Those are words I never want the Lord to direct at any of us.

You Can't Take It With You

God told this man that he was going to die that very night. And He asks the man in the parable a question: "The things that you have prepared, whose will they be?" What is Jesus getting at here? He is informing the man, "They won't be yours." I remember my grandfather telling me about all of the things he wanted to do when he retired. He had grand plans. So did the man in our parable. Both were taken sooner than they expected. You do not know your last day. But one thing is certain — when you pass from this life to the next, you aren't allowed to pack a suitcase. Everything you have ever purchased or built or saved will be distributed to someone else. That makes treasuring things of this world a fool's errand.

There Is a Greater Treasure

Jesus concludes the parable with the warning: "So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." In other words, there is a treasure that we can gain and enjoy right now. God is helping us to stretch our understanding of our existence beyond the 100 years or less that we inhabit this earth. To be rich toward God means to be occupied with His glory, delight in His love, and be content with His providential work in your life. It means to treasure the Savior rather than treasuring temporary things.

"Your life does not consist in an abundance of things. But the good news is that if you make Jesus your treasure, you will always be satisfied and never be disappointed. It is the greatest investment you can make with the currencies of your time and thoughts and emotions."

A great deal of this chapter is unique to Luke's gospel. Today we are going to consider three seeds that are planted in this chapter that will sprout into huge plot points later in the life of Jesus. Then we will jump back to the beginning of the chapter and consider the way the Lord teaches us to respond to tragedies.

Pilate

In the opening events of Luke 13 we are introduced to Pontius Pilate — a wicked ruler who had most likely been given his position as a punishment. We find that Pilate was particularly insensitive to the Jews' religious practices and vicious when it came to quelling rebellions. Here we find a group of Galileans who ended up on his bad side and he killed them, mixing their blood with the blood of their sacrifices. We see here the seeds of Pilate's brutality and rejection of Jewish worship — seeds we will see sprout fully when we arrive at the trial of Jesus.

The Fruitless Tree

The fruitless tree is a common metaphor that Jesus utilizes in the last days of His ministry in all three synoptic gospels. It is a reference back to multiple Old Testament passages comparing Israel to fruit trees or vines that did not produce good fruit. In verses 6–9, Jesus explains that the time of Judaism was coming to a swift conclusion — something we will see played out more as we make our way through Luke and into the book of Acts.

Herod

In order to really understand what is going on with Herod you first need to know three important things. First, there is more than one person named Herod:

- Herod the Great — tried to kill Jesus when He was a baby.
- Herod Antipas — son of Herod the Great. Known for killing John the Baptist and overseeing the trial of Jesus. This is the Herod at the end of Luke 13.
- Herod Agrippa I — grandson of Herod the Great. Persecuted the church and executed James the apostle (Acts 12:1–3). Famously eaten by worms.

- Herod Agrippa II — great-grandson of Herod the Great. Sent Paul to Rome to be tried by Nero (Acts 25–26). The last Herod and the last known Edomite of the stage of history.
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Second, Herod was not a real king — Rome had propped him up as a puppet ruler. Third, Herod was an Edomite (also called Idumeans by the Romans) — descendants of Esau who hated the Jews. There are many Old Testament prophecies that the Lord would eventually overthrow the Edomites through the Messiah (most famously the short book of Obadiah). It appeared as though they won at the cross. Little did they know that His crucifixion was their own demise. After King Agrippa II fell out of power, there is never again another known Edomite in history. God never fails to carry out His promised judgment — but He always does so in ways more complex and surprising than we could ever imagine.

Responding to Tragedies

[vs. 1–5](#)

There are often tragedies that befall our communities that cause us to ask profound theological questions. One common response from the Christian community is to ask whether the people who experienced the suffering deserved it. The Jews in Luke 13:1–5 are asking exactly that question — looking at two distinct tragedies and wondering if God killed these people because they were worse than everyone else.

Jesus helps us avoid presuming to know why God does the things that He does. Instead, He tells us that tragedies should cause us to look at ourselves and realize that we are worthy of God's wrath, and that the only way of escape from His judgment is through repentance. Praise God that He has saved us from the wrath we deserve.

There are several passages in the book of Luke that are very similar to the other synoptics, but Luke will choose to add a little more detail. Today we arrive at one such text. Luke 14:25–27 is found in other locations. However, verses 28–33 expound upon this teaching about "counting the cost" and these illustrations are found only here. Let's break this down by querying the text.

What Requirements Is Jesus Setting Forth?

vs. 27–33

Jesus makes three parallel statements that are requirements for following Him. These three things are not mutually exclusive — by understanding how they operate together, we come to a deeper understanding of what Jesus means.

- One must "bear his own cross." (vs. 27)
- One must "count the cost." (vs. 28)
- One must "renounce all that he has." (vs. 33)

What Cost Is Jesus Suggesting We Count?

It is important to clarify up front that Jesus is not suggesting that you have to purchase your salvation. The price for that is too high for any of us to pay. You cannot buy your way into the grace of God with any currency you could craft or imagine. 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 both tell us that we were "bought with a price." Acts 20:28 tells us we are "to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."

The cost to become a disciple is always high. In our society, there is minimal (although growing) social cost to being a follower of Jesus. You might miss out on a few promotions or dinner parties. But there is a deeper cost required of each disciple. J.C. Ryle notes that there are four things it will cost you to follow Jesus:

- Self-righteousness
- Sins (meaning ongoing sinful patterns of life)

- Love of ease
- The favor of the world

J.C. Ryle rightly concludes: "I grant that it costs much to be a true Christian. But who in his sound senses can doubt that it is worth any cost to have the soul saved? When the ship is in danger of sinking, the crew think nothing of casting overboard the precious cargo. When a limb is mortified, a man will submit to any severe operation, even amputation, to save his life. Surely a Christian should be willing to give up anything which stands between him and heaven."

"Have you truly counted the cost? When patterns of self-righteousness, sinful practices, love of ease, or overvaluing the world's opinion seep in, do you take swift action to put those sins to death?"

Today we are going to look at the most famous parable in the book of Luke. Charles Dickens called it, "The finest short story ever written." Usually the attention goes to the younger son. On many occasions preachers will rightfully highlight the second son. But the person in the story who is most glorified and usually most overlooked is the father.

I want us to recognize the unchanging, unlimited, unfading love of God that we see in this parable. But in doing so, I want us to be careful not to project ourselves onto the father character in the story. The point of the story is that He is not like us.

The father represents the whole of the Trinity – the heart of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The point Jesus is making here is very simple: God loves sinners. He does not merely tolerate us. He delights in us. Let's look at three actions of the Father that we see in this parable.

1. He Watched for His Son

The Father's love for the prodigal son never diminished. His eyes were glued to that horizon, waiting for the day that he would see him there once again. If you are a Christian, this is your story as well. But just how far off were you when God saw you? The Bible says that we were dead.

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved." – Ephesians 2:1–5

"But God shows His love for us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." – Romans 5:8

We were dead in our sins, enemies of God, and could only be described as ungodly – meaning we display ourselves to be opposite of God. That is how far away we were when God saw us and had compassion on us.

2. He Ran to His Son and Embraced Him

If the prodigal son were to have walked into the village, everyone that saw him would have scoffed at him. According to the customs of that day, it would be normal for the father to have made the son wait outside the gate for several days to publicly shame him.

But not only does the son not have to sit in sackcloth and ashes outside the house — he never had the chance to get near the gate. The father ran to him. The father shamed himself by showing his legs and running to greet him. The father took all the shame upon himself so that the son didn't know or experience any of it.

"Here is where we see the cross of Jesus Christ in this parable. The God of heaven, seated in glory, became a zygote clinging to the uterine wall of a teenage girl. He went from being worshiped by angels to being sought out to be killed by Herod. He clothed Himself in our shame, so that He might clothe us in glory."

3. The Father Clothed His Son

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly...'" The father does not hire the son as a servant. He brings him back to his full standing as a son. He gives him the best robe — the suit the father would normally be buried in. He has sandals brought for his feet, meeting his needs. He gives him a ring to wear on his finger, going far beyond his needs to restore his status. And he brings out the fattened calf — the animal set aside for the biggest meal of the year — and calls for a feast now.

The word prodigal means "to spend lavishly, freely, or extravagantly without thought or care of the cost." So we see that there are actually two prodigals in this story. The prodigal son who squandered his wealth with reckless living. And the prodigal Father who poured out undeserved blessings on His son.

There are multiple parables in Luke 16 that are exclusive to this gospel account. Today we are going to set our attention on the parable of "The Rich Man and Lazarus," found in verses 19–31. I want us to consider five main aspects of this story.

The Context

vs. 14

We are currently in a portion of the book that is a collection of the sermons Jesus taught during this phase of His ministry. In verse 14 we read, "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him." It is possible — maybe even likely — that this parable about a "rich man" is being directed at these scoffing Pharisees.

The Setting

Parables are generally set in a fictionalized setting that could easily be imagined by the listener. In our text today, we have the most interesting of all the settings for a parable. The first part takes place at the gate of the rich man's home. The second part takes place in Hades.

Hades is not the same thing as hell. Hades means death. Both believers and non-believers are described as going there before the resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus descended to the dead, He led them out in glorious procession to the reward procured at the cross. Ephesians 4:7–10 describes Jesus' descent into the earth: "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives..." If you have ever recited the Apostle's Creed, note that "He descended into hell" is not quite accurate — Jesus never experienced the wrath of God in hell. He experienced that wrath at the cross. When He went into the grave, He went there victoriously. He had already declared, "It is finished."

Not the Point

Many have co-opted this parable to be about generosity, social justice, and income inequality. Although the Bible does have something to say to those issues, that is not what is in view here. Jesus does not glorify poverty and demonize wealth. He does not teach that this rich man is suffering because he was rich, or that Lazarus experienced grace because he was poor. This parable is not about what you have.

The Point

This parable is about what you believe. The point is that if someone does not hear the Word of God, there is no other miracle that would ever convince them to believe. The Pharisees had more proof than anyone in the history of the world. They had the Scriptures, yet they rejected the Messiah to whom those words pointed.

Why does Jesus use the name Lazarus? This is literally the only time Jesus ever gives any character a name in any of the parables. It is because the name Lazarus has become synonymous with resurrection. God did raise someone named Lazarus from the grave. He did give evidence. And what happened? John 12:9–11 tells us: "The chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus."

"Why is our teaching, preaching, and evangelizing centered on the Word of God and not on anything else? Even miracles cannot convince someone to follow Christ. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes."

The Rich Man

Everything I have said so far in these notes are truths of which I am certain. What I am about to share is something I think is a persuasive argument. There are some who believe that the identity of this rich man would have been known and understood by Jesus' original audience. His name was Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was the high priest in Israel when Jesus was crucified — a highly political position. He purchased the position of high priest from his father-in-law Annas, making his authority completely illegitimate. This is why the trial of Jesus included a separate trial before both Caiaphas and Annas. The evidence that the parable is about Caiaphas includes: he was one of the wealthiest men in Israel; he wore purple in his official priestly ministry; he was supposed to provide spiritual nourishment for the people but didn't even give them crumbs; Annas had six total sons and sons-in-law (the five brothers the rich man wanted to warn); and Caiaphas responded to the resurrection not by investigating it, but by paying the guards to lie about it (Matthew 28:11–15).

So, my friends, do not be like Caiaphas. Whether or not this parable has him in view, he stands as a bleak warning of what happens when you have the Word of God but do not trust Christ. Look to Jesus, listen to Jesus, love Jesus.

The narrative in focus is about ten lepers. Leprosy was the medical death sentence in the ancient near east. It started with the loss of one's sense of touch and progressed to boils, scales, and rotting flesh. The reason these ten men approached Jesus outside of the city is that they were not permitted inside. They had been declared unclean. According to Leviticus 13, lepers were required to shout from a distance "UNCLEAN!" and were forced out of society into colonies alongside others who were likewise descending slowly into death.

The news of Jesus' power had traveled even into the leper colonies. These men trusted that the stories about Jesus were true, so they broke protocol and refused to adhere to their mandated quarantine in order to approach Jesus. They asked Him to have mercy on them — indicating that they truly believed the man standing in front of them could do what no doctor or priest had ever been able to accomplish.

It is interesting that Jesus does not say to them, "You are healed." Instead, He tells them to go and show themselves to the priest. The priest would be the only one who could examine them and give them the green light to re-enter society. Verse 14 includes one of those sentences that begs the reader to enter into rich contemplation: "And as they went they were cleansed." With each step toward the priest their skin was being restored.

Ten Cleansed, One Gave Thanks

There was one of the ten, a Samaritan, who stopped in his tracks and returned to Jesus. Notice that there has been a shift in his understanding. Earlier the lepers had referred to Jesus using the term of respect "Master." Look at verse 15 closely. "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks." This man understood that giving thanks to Jesus was synonymous with praising God.

Ten were cleansed. One gave thanks. All of them were healed of leprosy. But look closely at verse 19. After this Samaritan had already been healed of his disease, the Lord tells him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." The word we translate as "heal" and "save" are the same Greek word — *sozo*. Jesus is not saying his faith healed his body. He is telling him that his faith in Jesus has saved him.

"Brothers and sisters, you and I have been likewise saved from a fate worse than leprosy. The only appropriate response for the Christian is to give thanks to God — expressively and continually."

Many of Jesus' parables are presentations of contrast. The contrast is usually based around the actions of one person versus the actions of another. Jesus is never simply making a point about the outward actions — He uses these contrasts to unveil people's hearts. In Luke 18:9–14 we find a parable about two men who went up to pray.

Social Contrast

The two men are identified as a Pharisee and a tax collector. In the eyes of the original listeners, Pharisees were viewed as the most moral and upright people on earth. Tax collectors were at the opposite end of the spectrum — known for dishonesty and considered turncoats against their own people.

Posture Contrast

[vs. 11](#)

Verse 11 tells us that the Pharisee entered the temple and stood and prayed. The only indication of where he stood is discovered when we see the contrast with the tax collector who "stood a long way off." A long way from what? There were dedicated areas for prayer in the temple. The Pharisee stood, and rather than facing the direction where the presence of the Lord dwelt, he was looking out at the other people. His back was to the Lord. That is why he could look out and see the tax collector far away and call him out during his prayer. Meanwhile, the tax collector's posture reveals his awareness of his spiritual need. He was not even able to lift his eyes toward heaven, and he beat his breast — a common sign of regret and frustration at oneself.

Request Contrast

The Pharisee "thanked" God — for how much better he was than other men. He pointed out specific areas of moral significance: generosity beyond the requirements of the Law, and fasting twice a week. His biggest problem? He was comparing himself to other people to give himself assurance of his right standing with God. He based his entire relationship with God on what he felt he had earned through his works.

The tax collector, on the other hand, could only say, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." He rightly understood his need for mercy, and he knew that God was the only one who could provide it. There is no indication that the tax collector was in any kind of earthly trouble. He is simply a man who understood that he was a sinner in need of a Savior. It makes me

think of the lyrics of the old hymn "Come Ye Sinners": "Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream; all the fitness he requireth is to feel your need of Him."

Final Contrast

There are four sobering words that land like a nuclear warhead at the end of this passage. This parable would have totally rocked the sensibilities of the original audience when Jesus declared that the tax collector was justified "RATHER THAN THE OTHER." Both of them walked away believing that they were in a right relationship with the Lord. However, one of them was self-deceived. The Pharisee was trusting in his own righteousness and therefore would not stand in the judgment. The tax collector humbled himself before the Lord, and in the last day the Lord will lift him up.

"One of the questions we ask people when they are pursuing membership is, 'Upon what are you basing your salvation?' How would you answer that question? Would it sound like the Pharisee's prayer or the tax collector's prayer?"

There are a few very unfortunate chapter breaks in the Bible. Remember, the chapters and verses are helpful, but they are not inspired by God. Today is one of those examples. What I would like to do is rewind to the end of chapter 18 and show you how putting these two events together helps us to understand the greater point of both narratives.

Part 1: Blind Beggar Healed

This story begins as Jesus was nearing the rebuilt city of Jericho. With every step toward the city, the crowds grew larger. When this blind man was told that Jesus was the cause of the commotion, he began to cry out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" The title "Son of David" was not just a statement of genealogy — it was a title reserved for the One who would fulfill the covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7, that there would be a King who would rule on David's throne forever. This blind man could see Jesus' true identity better than almost anyone else He encountered during His earthly ministry. Jesus did show mercy and heal the blind man. Pay close attention to how the story concludes: "And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."

Part 2: Zacchaeus Redeemed

The healing took place directly outside the city gates. The next part of our story begins right after Jesus walked through the gates and into the city of Jericho. Zacchaeus was not only a tax collector — he was the chief tax collector, the upper management of the corrupt system by which the Roman government allowed tax collectors to gouge their own countrymen. This would have made him the most hated person in the city.

Zacchaeus didn't even attempt to press his way through the crowd. Instead he climbed a sycamore tree — at which point Jesus looked up to the exact place where Zacchaeus was. The tax collector was attempting to avoid being at the center of public attention, but it is Jesus who places him there. Zacchaeus joyfully received the Messiah who called to him, and his life was so transformed that he repaid fourfold those whom he had defrauded.

Notice how the crowd responded to Jesus going to eat with Zacchaeus. Verse 7 tells us that they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." When there was a poor, blind beggar who needed help or healing, the people rejoiced in the works of Jesus. But when someone that they hated was the beneficiary of Jesus' love and attention, they were outraged.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." — Luke 19:10. Both the blind man and the tax collector needed salvation. Both humbled themselves before Christ. Both were saved. Be thankful today that Jesus sought you out and saved you."

LUKE 19:10

There are many occasions in the gospels when people ask Jesus a question. He usually responds with a very rich and powerful answer. However, there are occasions when Jesus answers a question with a question. Why does He do that? Because the intent of the question was to trap or attack rather than to receive an answer. They were loaded questions intended to turn the government or the populace against Him.

When studying logic and rhetoric, the most common example provided to describe a loaded question is, "When did you stop beating your wife?" If a person refuses to answer, they appear guilty. If they answer with a time or date, they appear guilty. If they deny it, they appear guilty. So how do you answer a loaded question? With a question.

The chief priests and scribes knew that Jesus could not say that His authority was derived from Rome, because the common Jewish people would reject Him. If He said that He gained His authority from a Jewish source, they would claim He would have to submit to their authority under Jewish Law. If He claimed it was from God, they would accuse Him of blasphemy and have Him executed. Knowing it was not His time, Jesus instead asked a question that He knew they could not answer. "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?"

Luke provides for us the reasons that they could not select from those two multiple choice options. If they said it was from heaven, it would have revealed that they had rejected God's plan by rejecting John. If they said it was from man, the people would have rejected them because the crowds knew better. So they said that they could not give an answer, and Jesus told them He would not give them an answer either.

"There are times when people are mocking you or seeking to trap you with their questions. There are times it is acceptable not to play into the hands of a scoffer. Pray for wisdom to answer lovingly and wisely, just like Jesus."

In this chapter we find a sermon that Jesus preached which is commonly known as "the Olivet Discourse." We also find this sermon in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. It is an extended passage about the coming judgment of the Jewish nation as well as the return of Christ. There are only three verses in this discourse that are unique to Luke's gospel: namely verses 34–36.

"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

What is the difference between being awake and asleep? When you are asleep, you are unaware of what is taking place around you. You are completely disconnected from any sense of responsibility or urgency.

Jesus says that we are not to sleep. This has a double meaning. First, there is the literal way it was fulfilled — in the very next chapter, Jesus tells His disciples to "Pray that you may not enter into temptation," but He returns to find them sleeping. They literally fell asleep and were literally caught suddenly in a trap. I am certain the words of Jesus from the Olivet Discourse must have been running through their minds after they fled from the chaos of the arrest.

There is also obviously a greater meaning — it is speaking about the way that we live before the Lord. Jesus uses three categories of living that are to be avoided:

1. DISSIPATION

The Greek word is *kraipale* (κραিপαλε), found only once in the Bible — right here in Luke 21:34. It is related to drunkenness but is more about the way people act when they are drunk: they become fearless of things they should rightly fear. Drunk people have diminished inhibitions against practicing foolishness. One of the early church fathers, Clement of Alexandria, described this word as "the headache and giddiness caused by drinking much wine." Jesus warns us to be sober-minded.

2. DRUNKENNESS

By demanding that we avoid spiritual drunkenness, Jesus is commanding us not to push away from the important things of God by drowning them out with things that we imagine will make us happy. Drunkenness is a reference to a constant return to that which is self-destructive. It feels good, but it is bad for your soul. Jesus is telling us not to live our Christian lives being constantly distracted by the things of this world.

3. THE CARES OF THIS WORLD

As Christians, we are supposed to steward the gifts that the Lord gives to us. It is not wrong to own things. It is wrong to allow your things to own you. When your personal kingdom becomes your focus more than the kingdom of God, then you are not paying attention to the things which Christ is calling us to consider in Luke 21.

"Church, we are called to stay awake so that we might 'stand before the Son of Man.'"

Luke 22 is one of the fullest chapters in the Bible. When the chapter begins, the Passover has not yet started, the twelve disciples are still together, and the scribes and Pharisees were still unable to hatch a plot that would result in a crucified Jesus. Seventy-one verses later, Jesus has been arrested, Judas has turned traitor, the disciples have been scattered, and the religious elites have been handed their opportunity to crucify the Lord of glory. For today I have selected the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane.

Gethsemane was a garden in the center of an olive grove on the Mount of Olives — likely where Jesus and His disciples were staying each night. This allowed Jesus to have a private place to go without the crowds following or the Sanhedrin snooping. But this night in the garden would be different than any other.

Utterly Alone

At the outset of this time in the garden, at the height of Jesus' emotional affliction, He is left utterly alone by His friends. If you have ever felt lonely or isolated when experiencing a trial, He can empathize. The gargantuan task set before Him was greater than any feat ever set before another man. In the greatest moment of spiritual warfare ever fought through prayer, Jesus was alone before the Father.

Jesus commanded the disciples to pray "so that they would not fall into temptation." Do you remember the last time Jesus was tempted? At the end of that temptation we read that "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time." (Luke 4:13) It appears as though the cause of Jesus' agony was due to the combination of temptation from Satan and the full awareness of what is about to happen to Him.

The Cup of Wrath

Luke informs us that the distress of Jesus was so intense that "His sweat became like great drops of blood." This may be speaking of literal blood — it is possible for extreme stress to cause the blood vessels in the forehead to burst, resulting in blood mixing with sweat. Regardless, the point is clear. The suffering of Jesus began well before the cross.

Why such agony? The answer is found in His request: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Jesus is not asking for the removal of the physical suffering He was about to face. It is the cup of wrath that He

pleads to be removed. The cup of wrath is an Old Testament expression of judgment — found in Jeremiah 25, Isaiah 51, and Psalm 75. It is always a reference to the full force of God's fury that will be the drink of His enemies. Consider Isaiah 53:10: "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt..."

"The love of God for you is objectively on display in the garden of Gethsemane. How could we question the love of Jesus for us when we see His commitment to the mission?"

*"Lest I forget Gethsemane, / Lest I forget Thine agony; / Lest I forget Thy love for me,
/ Lead me to Calvary." — Jennie E. Hussey, "Lead Me to Calvary"*

In the first garden, Adam and Eve plunged the world into sin and death by listening to the tempter. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus overcame temptation and committed Himself to the will of the Father. When you are tempted to do your will in contrast to God's will, follow in the footsteps of your Savior and say, "Not my will, but yours be done."

There are seven times that Jesus spoke from the cross. They are spread across the four gospels as each author takes a slightly different focus of the final hours. Over the course of six agonizing hours, these are the seven sayings of Jesus in chronological order:

- Luke 23:34 – "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
- Luke 23:43 – "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."
- John 19:26–27 – "Woman, behold, your son! ... Behold, your mother!"
- Matt. 27:46 – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
- John 19:28 – "I thirst."
- John 19:30 – "It is finished!"
- Luke 23:46 – "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

Today we are just going to set our attention very briefly on the three of these sayings found in Luke 23.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

vs. 34

In Isaiah 53:12 we are told that the Messiah would "make intercession for the transgressors." Intercession is a form of prayer where you plead on behalf of another. Here we see the Lord Jesus calling out for the Father to forgive transgressors even as He Himself "poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors." Let me share with you an extended quote from A.W. Pink regarding sinning in ignorance:

"Sin is always sin in the sight of God – whether we are conscious of it or not. Sins of ignorance need atonement just as truly as do conscious sins. God is holy, and He will not lower His standard of righteousness to the level of our ignorance. Ignorance is not innocence... And yet the fact remains that we are ignorant of many things, and the fault and blame are ours. And this does not minimize the enormity of our guilt. Sins of ignorance need divine forgiveness, as our Lord's prayer here plainly shows. Praise Him for an atonement of infinite sufficiency, which cleanseth from all sin." – A.W. Pink

With this saying from the cross, Jesus teaches us how to forgive from the heart. He is the only one who has ever been completely innocent, yet He could love His enemies and pray for those who persecuted Him.

"Today you will be with me in paradise."

vs. 43

Jesus was crucified between two insurrectionists. One of the men mockingly accused Jesus by saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" — an insult hurled also by passing travelers and the soldiers. Even with his dying words, that man could not help but speak with vitriol toward the Savior. John MacArthur notes the irony: "Jesus was being mocked because He could not save Himself, yet He saved others, including the [other] thief, by not saving Himself."

The other man, however, saw in Jesus a place to go for forgiveness. He recognized that he was truly a sinner condemned not only by the Romans, but by God Himself. He could see the incalculable difference between his track record of wickedness and Jesus who "has done nothing wrong." Notice three things this man understood about Jesus: (a) Jesus was sinless, (b) Jesus could save him, (c) Jesus' kingdom would be established after His death. In reality, we were once all on death row. We all have limited time before the judgment. But for any that seek to find mercy in Christ, they will find it.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

vs. 46

The sky has become dark. Luke literally tells us that "the sun's light failed." Creation itself was more aware of the terrible nature of the crucifixion than those who watched on. Jesus had already declared, "It is finished!" This saying likely took place just moments later. It is a beautiful picture of the surety Christ had that He would soon be reunited to a perfect relationship with the Father.

Jesus always displayed a life of perfect submission to the Father. However, at the cross Jesus bore the sins of His people. Instead of feeling the love He had always experienced from the Father, He suffered the wrath of His Father. Even so, Jesus knew that the Father would vindicate Him, receive Him, and restore Him after His death. With this final saying, Jesus instructs us how we are to die. When that time comes, we can close our eyes one last time with full assurance that our spirit is being set into the palms of our Good Father for eternity.

Today we conclude the book of Luke, but we are not concluding the writings of Luke. He is also the author of the book of Acts. The two work together to display the work of Christ in seeking and saving the lost. Most of Luke 24 is exclusive to this gospel account. The way we are going to approach this passage is to answer seven questions that come to my mind as I read it.

1. Who Are These Two Disciples?

Luke tells us that one of them is named Cleopas. It is very possible that the other disciple was Cleopas' wife — the argument in favor being that Mary, the wife of Clopas, is mentioned in John 19:25. We see that they are able to give an accurate description of all the things that happened to Jesus. They had the facts, but they missed the point.

2. Where Are They Traveling To?

They are making the seven-mile journey to Emmaus. If you pay attention, verse 28 says that they reached the village and invited Jesus in for a meal. Later, they were so overjoyed with what they had seen and heard that they got back up and walked seven miles back to Jerusalem. (vs. 33)

3. How Were They Feeling?

When describing the death of Jesus, Cleopas says, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." Their hope is past tense — it seems as though their hopes had been dashed. After hearing the women's testimony of Jesus' resurrection, they still chose to leave Jerusalem and go home. They appear downcast and deeply disappointed.

4. How Does Jesus Correct Their Thinking?

After hearing Cleopas' dullness regarding the purposes of the cross, Jesus mildly rebukes the two of them: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" This appears to be a gracious correction willingly received by these bedraggled and distraught disciples. Jesus does the most loving thing He could do. He revealed the truth through the Scriptures.

5. What Did Jesus Show Them from the Bible?

John 5:39 teaches us that Jesus is the point of every Scripture. The particular focus of this discussion was to prove that the Old Testament teaches that the Christ must suffer. "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Jesus was systematically walking through the Old Testament to show them the various references, allusions, prophecies, and sacrifices that prefigured or pointed to the cross.

6. Why Did These Two Disciples Not Recognize Jesus?

This is a mysterious element. The explanation is without a doubt supernatural. Jesus was functioning in a way that our bodies don't — in verse 31 it tells us that as soon as they realize He is Jesus, "He vanished from their sight." We can only surmise that Jesus intended to conceal His identity for a few hours so that He might have the ability to preach about Himself from the Old Testament before they rushed back to Jerusalem to spread the news.

7. What Caused These Two Disciples to Recognize Jesus?

Just as Jesus did at the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. I would venture to guess that Jesus had probably included the Passover meal as part of His explanation of why the Christ must suffer. When Cleopas and the other disciple saw the breaking of the bread and heard the blessing, they immediately understood the identity of the one across the table from them. They then expressed how the teaching of Jesus caused their hearts to burn within them — and they could not help but get back up and make their way back to Jerusalem to tell the others what they had seen and heard.

"Jesus is the point of every Scripture. He revealed the truth through the Scriptures — and their hearts burned within them. May our hearts burn within us every time we open the Word."