

Introducing Jesus

A STUDY OF JESUS AND THE GOSPELS WITH PARTICULAR
ATTENTION TO LUKE'S ACCOUNT
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1 Introduction

There are four Gospels or accounts focusing on the life of Jesus. John stands distinct from the other three with Matthew, Mark and Luke being referred to as The Synoptic Gospels meaning that they can be read together. This is due to the fact that there appears to be a significant overlap of source material (more on which later).

From the 19th Century onwards, there was a tendency amongst scholarship, particularly but not exclusively liberal scholarship, to assume late dating of all the Gospels, in other words that the final accounts were only written down at least a 100 years after the events. Alongside this, there was a strong presumption that if there was a historical figure called Jesus with most but not all commentators assuming that there was, that the Gospel accounts significantly embellish on the events of his life and so we can in fact say very little about his actual historical life. This led to what was known as "The Quest for the Historical Jesus."

Our presumption is quite different. There is good reason to assume that the Gospel accounts were all written within the life time of Jesus' immediate followers, prior to AD70. This is due partly to the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was such a significant event that if the accounts were written after, we would expect the destruction of the Temple to create a greater shadow over the narratives. There are other reasons for presuming an early dating as well.¹

Whilst traditionally, it was assumed that Matthew was the first Gospel, so that the order in our bibles is linked to the date of writing, it is now generally agreed that Mark was most likely written first with Matthew and Luke following later.

We will be looking at the life of Jesus as told in the Gospels with a particular focus on Luke's Gospel.

¹ On the dating of the Synoptic Gospels, see Bernier, *Rethinking the dates of the New Testament: The evidence for early composition* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2022), 35-86.

2 Orderly verified accounts

Luke was a companion of the apostle Paul. He is the recognised author of both Luke and Acts and so at the point when he joins Paul on his missionary journeys, we can see a switch from the third person (he/they) to the first person, plural (we) as Luke describes the acts of the apostles. Luke was a physician and shows particular interest in healing. We could treat Luke-Acts as one volume, it is bookended by events in Rome concerning the emperor and at the centre of it is the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

2.1 Read Luke 1:1-4

Luke tells us that there have been numerous accounts from eyewitnesses and that he has taken time to investigate the claims in order to produce his own account (v1-3a). This introduces us to a couple of themes. First, that there is a claimed trustworthiness to the Gospels. First hand witness accounts should be treated at face value and if investigated during the lifetime of other witnesses there is opportunity to challenge or confirm their claims.

Secondly, Luke makes it clear that he is not himself an eyewitness but rather relies on hearing the reports of those who were. This introduces us to the question of source criticism. When you place the three synoptic Gospels side by side, you discover significant overlap between them. Significant portions of the text are so similar that it is unlikely that this is due purely to the authors writing about the same things, however, there are enough difference between the accounts for us to also assume that it isn't a simple matter of cut and paste. This has led to the conclusion that the Gospel writers relied on written sources, at least two and possibly four. Remember that in the 20th century, the dominant view seemed to be that the final Gospels were written much later. So, it is assumed that there was one source that Mark's Gospel relies upon almost exclusively. There are possible sources that only the final authors of Matthew and Luke respectively had access to. Finally, it was assumed that there was a source common to at least Matthew and Luke.

The final source became known as Q. This does not exist as an actual physical document but rather, we are simply dealing with a compilation of Jesus' sayings identified as common to the two. I am personally sceptical that such a single document existed. However, I have no problem with the idea that the Gospel writers would have been using both written and oral sources. Indeed, they would have had access to what each of them was writing as well as having face to face conversations with one another.

It is worth noting that until the 20th century and the development of modern citation methods, there was a different attitude towards how you used sources from others. For Luke to take Marks work and include it within his own (see also the relationship between Jude and Peter's epistles) would not have counted as plagiarism. There was no attempt to pass the work off as your own and the original source would have been known and obvious.²

Luke describes what he has written as an orderly or accurate account. The emphasis is not on this being ordered chronologically. Indeed, whilst we can work out a rough chronology, it becomes clear

² For an introduction to source criticism and Q see Stein, "The Synoptic Problem, Pages 784-792 in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Ed. Green, McKnight & Howard Marshall, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 317-312.

that none of the Gospels attempt to do this. Rather, the content is structured in line with the purpose and message of the Gospel (v3a).³

Luke writes to someone called Theophilus, possible a mentor and benefactor but his name which may have been a nickname means “one who loves God”. It has also been suggested that he may possibly have been a metaphorical figure or literary creation of Luke, there to represent sincere enquirers everywhere.⁴ There has been some discussion as to whether or not Theophilus was a believer already. In favour of this suggestion is that this would make him more likely to sponsor Luke’s work, against is that it raises the question as to why he wasn’t addressed as “brother.” On balance, it seems likely that he represented sincere enquirers (v3b).⁵

So, Luke writes for those who love and want to know God. His aim is that this orderly account will help Theophilus to know the truth. There is a qualitative dimension to this, it is “certain knowledge”. If a sincere inquirer, then he will have heard reports about Jesus and Luke’s aim is to confirm their accuracy. However, I would suggest that this is wider than the bare facts.⁶ Indeed, whether an inquirer or a believer who has grown up on the Christian message, his biggest challenge may not have been confidence in the factual claims about a miracle worker from Galilee, or that this man was “king of the Jews.” He may have had question marks about the resurrection, something that no-one, Jew or Gentile was expecting at that time for one person. However, his biggest need may well have been to know that this Jesus could be his king and saviour, that he too could be included within God’s people (v4). He could have confidence in the truth claims of the Christian message and by implication, confidence or assurance in his own faith.

2.2 What does a Gospel do?

Gospels have at times been compared to modern biographies but that may not be the helpful comparison. There may be similarities perhaps with the memoirs of political leaders, see for example those by Tony Blair, George Bush and Margaret Thatcher. Such accounts do not give the same level of attention to each stage in the subject’s life. Rather, there may be a couple of chapters giving an overview of the person’s background but the vast majority focuses on their time in office.

The Gospels give most of their attention to the Jesus’ three years of public ministry and out of those three years, most attention focuses on the last few weeks, days and hours of his earthly ministry. Mark, from the halfway point is in effect taking us on the final journey to Jerusalem and the Cross.

Each Gospel begins with some form of short prologue announcing its intent, Matthew beginning with a genealogy which offers an echo of the structure of Genesis, the Torah and other Old Testament books such as 1 and 2 Chronicles. Luke’s prologue is a letter of introduction to Theophilus. All of the Gospels then take us to the beginning of Jesus ministry, his baptism in the Jordan and calling of the Disciples.

Each account then describe some of Jesus miracles and introduce us to his teaching including dialogues with opponents such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then the focus narrows in on the

³ “the word can denote the use of an ordering principle that sets the parts in logical relationship to a coherently understood whole (ie. an ordering according to the sense of the whole) and this seems to suit best Luke’s use here.” Nolland, Luke 1-9:20 (WBC 35. Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 10.

⁴ Leon Morris, (TNTC. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL.: 1988), 82.

⁵ Morris, *Luke*, 83.

⁶ “What Theophilus has heard is something more than the mere events of the days of Jesus. It is a significant choice of those events, which has been preached with incandescent power by the apostles.” Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke* (BST. Leicester: IVP. 1979), 30.

journey to Jerusalem, through Jericho, the triumphant entry and final week leading up to the last supper. Each Gospel gives significant attention to the events of Good Friday. Mark concludes with a short account of the resurrection whilst Matthew, Luke and John all offer extended accounts of Easter Sunday and the following weeks leading to the ascension of Jesus.

We can identify the structure of Luke's Gospel as follows:

- 1:1-4 Introduction and Prologue
- 1:5-2:52 Birth and Infancy including visit to Jerusalem aged 12.
- 3:1-6:49 Jesus' mission including calling of disciples and setting out of teaching in the Sermon on the mount/plain
- 7:1-9:50 Early ministry, especially around Galilee
- 9:51 -20:27 Journey to the Cross, the road to Jerusalem through Jericho.
- 20:38 -22:66 the last week up until the Last Supper/Passover Meal.
- 22:66 – 24:53 Death and Resurrection of Jesus (including the trial)

2.3 Teaching and Preaching the Gospels

I remember at Theological College, that during Old Testament and New Testament studies, we as students would often impatiently ask the lecturer, "This is all very interesting but how do we preach it?" Some of you will be responsible for preaching or teaching in other situations such as with children and teens or in small groups. It is good to have in mind that goal of being able to teach God's Word to others. However, I am mindful of the advice given to us by one of the lecturers. He encouraged us to slow down and not always be in a rush to get to our own sermon preparation. I would give the same advice here. Slow down and get the big picture of what is going on in the Gospels.

This means that we start by thinking about what the Gospels say, making sure we have read them accurately, not just glossing the text with our own expectations often filtered by what we have seen elsewhere or picked up from tradition. This means taking each Gospel on its own terms. We want to know what Luke or Mark say and understand their specific choices not being tempted to leap to Matthew's version and vice versa, even if it seems that another Gospel's version preaches more easily.

When we know what the passage says, we can then move to thinking about what it means, working on interpretation. It is from there that we begin to apply the text thinking about what it has to say to the whole church and from there thinking about how God is speaking to us personally. It is only at that point, where we have dwelt on hearing God and obeying ourselves that we can move to preaching.

Now, the Gospels are primarily narrative though they include significant portions of teaching material from Jesus and to a greater or lesser extent commentary from the writers. This can create a challenge because you may have heard it said that we should not use descriptive Bible narratives to make prescriptive commandments. Well, it is certainly true that we need to be careful. We cannot assume that description of specific events is meant to be normative. Specifically when it comes to the Gospels, we do well to avoid a shallow "What Would Jesus Do?" approach to application. We need to recognise that there was a uniqueness to his ministry.

However, the Gospels are written and structured with material selected in order to make intentional points. We are meant to learn from them and not just out of intellectual curiosity. The Gospels will teach us about how to live as God's people. This requires a judicious reading. First of all, it will

involve looking at any overt explanations given, telling us what to do with the relevant Bible passages. Secondly, it will mean asking questions about how and why the material is selected and how it has been ordered. Look out for themes that build and link together. Thirdly, having found out what each Bible passage says on its own merits, we do want to pay attention to context and read the Gospels canonically. This means considering how the passage in front of us relates to other parts of Scripture. Again, sometimes, especially with Matthew, we are shown how this fulfils Old Testament Scripture but not always. So we will have to look carefully for the clues. Then we might also begin to see links between Gospel narratives and propositional material in the epistles.

2.4 What truth did Luke want us to be certain of?

We sometimes (often) approach Luke 1:1-4 as a kind of apologetics text, a foundation for setting out a defence of the reliability of the Gospels. However, whilst the points about careful investigation, orderly accounts and eye witness reports are helpful to some of our apologetic approaches (I pick up on some of those issues in The First Look Course), there are a few reasons as to why we might not want this to be our focus.

First, whilst our desire as Christians is to prove the reliability of the accounts, this isn't often the kind of question that people are asking. It's not even about whether it works, or about all truths being relative now, we've moved on even from post-modern concerns. There is a suspicion of some truth claims, especially those attached to establishment sources. After all, if you can create fake news, you can also create fake evidence. There is also a willingness to accept other truth claims from alternative sources.

So, it is worth remembering that at the time, Luke was writing his Gospel that Christianity was not the establishment position. The Gospel writers all wrote from marginalised positions. This is especially true given it was likely that they wrote prior to AD70 but even if they wrote much later, they still all preceded the post Constantine world where Christianity dominated.

Secondly, whilst Theophilus, the initial recipient may have had a need for certainty and assurance about what he was hearing, it wasn't necessary in relation to the kinds of questions and doubts that our modern approaches to apologetics assume. He would have had little problem accepting that there was a virgin and that a divine power had caused her to conceive or that the child was able to work miracles, nor indeed that he may have been Israel's messiah figure. He may have had questions about the likelihood of resurrection, something that no one was really expecting as a one off event for one person at that time.

However, I'm inclined to think that the big question for people like Theophilus was about whether the claims were true that Jesus had come for people like him, that Jesus was his Christ, his saviour, that he could be included in the resurrection and the Kingdom.

This may well help us to think about our situation. Whilst the question about whether or not we can trust the Bible may still be relevant in evangelistic contexts, it may not be the thing that those hearing us preach Luke are worried about. Indeed, by coming to hear us, they have indicated a willingness to take what we say on trust. The bigger questions are more likely to be around "is this for me?" Could Jesus really love, die for and save someone like me?

And this question can be as pertinent for long term believers as it is for new inquirers. There are all kinds of reasons as to why we may at any point struggle to believe that Jesus loves us and came to save us.

3 Precursors

Mark and John both launch straight into the adult ministry of Jesus whereas Matthew and Luke both commence with birth narratives, although picking up on different aspects of the nativity. There has been a tendency by some to over make much out of this difference between the Gospels with the implication being that because the nativity narratives do not appear in all the accounts then these must be later additions based more on mythology than history. I cannot really see any good reason for such a conclusion. As we have already discussed, the Gospel authors have carefully chosen their material to build their specific argument.

We would do better then to consider why Matthew and Luke choose to include the passages that they do. What purpose does this serve. In Matthew's case, there is a strong emphasis on fulfilment with Jesus portrayed as the true heir of David, the fulfilment of Messianic promise. Matthew's focus on Jesus as Herod's rival fits with this as does the flight to Egypt and return with echoes of the Exodus and return from Exile. Jesus is not only David's heir but the fulfilment of all God's promises.

Luke meanwhile with his laser focus on giving assurance and certainty concerning the truth of early Christian claims takes us to the witness of angels, who will be there to witness the resurrection and ascension too. The birth narrative also introduces Mary as a reliable eye witness, presumably one who Luke relied upon.

Meanwhile, it serves the tone of Mark's Gospel with its sense of imminence and urgency concerning the coming kingdom to take us speedily to Christ's adult ministry. John's style being more reflective we should be unsurprised to see birth narratives replaced with extended theological reflection on the incarnation. I also am personally inclined to see the early reference to the clearing of the Temple as significant and not accidental. This along with the night conversations with Nicodemus suggest to me that John is inviting us right from the start into the events of the last week so that the description of earlier miracles and signs acts like flashbacks informing the events of Holy Week. This also means that even as we look at John's description of Jesus' early ministry, we can never escape the shadow of the Cross.

As it happens, Luke goes back further still than Matthew before Mary's pregnancy and those first angelical encounters for her and Joseph. John the Baptist is a significant figure in all the Gospel accounts. He is the forerunner or pre-cursor to Jesus. Luke not only narrates the events relating to Jesus' birth but also goes right back to the beginning of John's life too.

3.1 Read Luke 1:5-25

The section begins with the phrase "in the days of Herod". Not only does this identify a specific period in history but it follows the literary style of Old Testament narrative. Specific events are often introduced with the words "In the days of" or "in those days".⁷ Luke links the events and people he is reporting on with the events of Israelite history, with the patriarchs, judges, prophets and kings.

Herod the Great (72-4BC) was from Idumea (Edom). He was not a hereditary king but rather a client of Rome, he had undertaken military campaigns in the region on Rome's behalf and was recognised as king by the Senate. He had converted to Judaism although the authenticity of his conversion was

⁷ See for example: Genesis 14:1; Judges 5:6. Judges 8:28; Ruth 1:1; 1 Samuel 17:12; 1 Chronicles 4:41; Ezra 4:7.

questioned and undertook a significant building project to expand improve the second Temple in Jerusalem.⁸

We are introduced to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was a priest, from the tribe of Levi and his wife was also a descendant of Aaron (v5). They are both described as righteous but they are also childless (v6-7). This again is significant. Other examples of infertility in Scripture include Rachel, mother of Joseph and Hannah, mother of Samuel. Abraham, the forefather of God's people, along with his wife Sarah was also childless and righteous. Luke is setting the scene for God to intervene in an incredible way.

We meet Zechariah, on duty in the Temple, with echoes of Isaiah serving there when he encountered God (v8-10).⁹ This time, it is an angel that appears, Zechariah is afraid (v11-12). The angel reassures him that there is no need for fear and then brings him the good news that their prayers are answered. God will give them a son. They are to name him John. He will cause joy to them and to others (v13-15). John will be a great person, a man of God. So, vows are to be undertaken similar to the Nazarite vow that Samson and his parents were committed to. John will be filled with God's Spirit and will be a prophet bearing resemblance to Elijah. His job will be to bring people to repentance ("turn the hearts") and to prepare them for the Lord's coming (v16-17).

Zechariah's response is uncertain "How can I be sure?" Or "Can I really trust you on this." He points out that both he and his wife are into their old age. The Angel's response is to declare his own credentials: his name, his standing before God and his specific commission here. Zechariah can be sure because God has spoken through the angel. He is not to doubt based on his circumstances. God will give a sign though but it also acts as a rebuke. Because Zechariah did not listen or speak with faith, he will be silenced until God's Word is fulfilled. The people waiting outside are concerned by the time it is taking for Zechariah to come out. When he does come out of the temple, he is mute and must rely on signs and signals to communicate with them. (v18-22).

Zechariah's silence echoes the way in which God had spoken to the people of Israel and Judah through the prophets but they had refused to listen, believe or obey. The result had been a 400 year period of prophetic silence from Malachi until now.

Zechariah completes his service in the temple and then returns home. Elizabeth becomes pregnant as the angel promised. She responds in belief, recognising that God had done this, removing the shame and stigma of infertility. She remains in seclusion for 5 months (v23-25).

3.2 Read Luke 1:26-38

Six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy and Gabriel is sent with another message, this time to Nazareth in Galilee, to Mary, who is introduced as a virgin, betrothed but not yet married. These details are important (v26-27). He tells her that she is favoured by God. She is bewildered but he goes on to explain why (v28-29)

The angel tells Mary that she is going to have a son, he will be called Jesus (or Yeshua/Joshua meaning "Yahweh saves/delivers"). Like John, he will be great but there will be something greater than him. It is obvious that it is his coming that John will be sent to prepare the people for. His greatness is linked here to his relationship to God "The Son of the most-high" and his relationship to the people. Jesus will be a descendant of David and the angel promises that God will give him his

⁸ For more on Herod, see Hoehner, "Herodian Dynasty" Pages 317-326 in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Ed. Green, McKnight & Howard Marshall, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992) 317-312.

⁹ Isaiah 6.

ancestor's kingdom. Jesus is the coming king, God's anointed one, the Messiah or Christ. His kingdom, unlike previous kingdoms will be without end. God will establish his rule for ever (1:26-33).

Mary asks how it is possible for this to happen as she is at this stage a virgin. There seems to be something distinctive about her response to Zechariah's response. Yes, she has questions, yes she doesn't fully comprehend but her questions are legitimate, God had given people children in their old age and reversed infertility in the past but a virgin birth would be unprecedented. Mary's enquiries also seem to be treated as coming from a place of faith not doubt. So Gabriel, does two things. First, he explains the how. He says that her miraculous birth will be a work of God's Holy Spirit. Second, he provides a sign in the form of Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy (v34-37). Note that Elizabeth and Mary are related, possible first or second cousins. This suggests that not only was Jesus descended through Judah and David, so from the kingly line but also through Levi and Aaron so part of the priestly line. Mary responds by expressing her trust and her obedience. (v38).

3.3 Sonship

The description of Jesus as "The Son of the highest" is significant. Later, Luke will refer to Adam as "the son of God" indicating that sonship is something which belongs to humanity in general.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Matthew picks up on Hosea's prophecy "out of Egypt I have called my son".¹¹ The original prophecy, applied by Matthew to Jesus' flight and return from Egypt to escape Herod, was a reference to Israel and the Exodus. So, Israel is also described as God's Son. To describe Jesus as "God's Son" therefore, is first of all a statement about his humanity. Jesus

John's Gospel tells us that Jesus is God's unique son, he is the "only begotten son".¹² This distinguishes Jesus out from other sons. Humans may be God's children by creation but through sin are alienated from God. Israel was designated or chosen as a son and this hints at the possibility that fallen humans might be adopted back into God's family. Jesus as "the begotten son" is not created, appointed or adopted. John's Gospel is clear that everything that has been created was created through Jesus. Jesus is identified as "The Word" or revelation of God, one who was with God in eternity because he was and is God (John 1:1-4). In those brief words, John introduces us to the concept of The Trinity.

3.4 Read Luke 1:39-45

Mary's next response is to hurry to meet her relative Elizabeth at her home in Judea (v39-40). When the baby, John, hears the voice of Mary arriving, we are told that he leapt in the womb. John recognised the arrival of God's favoured servant and with her the pre-natal Christ (v41). We cannot pass over this small detail without making an ethical observation. It is clear that Scripture recognises unborn babies as conscious, living, spiritual persons. When it comes to the question of abortion, the bible is clear that the unborn life has value. Christians should be on the side of the baby and so our desire should be to see an end to abortion. This is not to lack compassion for mothers, especially when pregnancy is a result of rape or where there is risk to their emotional or even physical well-being and safety. However, we need to be clear that abortion will not resolve those problems.

Elizabeth too responds. Luke says that she is "filled with the Holy Spirit" indicating that she is about to prophesy. She repeats Gabriel's assessment that Mary is favoured or uniquely blessed (v42). Mary's visit is more amazing to Elizabeth than her own miracle. Why? Because Mary's baby is her

¹⁰ Luke 3:38.

¹¹ Matthew 2:15, c.f. Hosea 11:1.

¹² John 3:16.

lord. Note the close connection between her description of Jesus as her lord and her reference to “the Lord”. It could be that she simply recognises Jesus as her human lord, her rightful king and master as David’s heir. However, the close connection of the two here suggests that she understood Jesus to be “The Lord” where Lord was used to refer to Yahweh (v43).

Elizabeth reports to Mary how her baby had leapt at the sound of Mary’s voice, it is presumably through Mary that Luke hears of this (v44). Elizabeth also repeats the designation of Mary as blessed (v45).

3.5 Echoes, foreshadows and fulfilments.

As I mentioned earlier, there are clues in the text that Luke wants to connect John and Jesus into the history of Israel and to present the events he is describing as foreshadowed in Torah and the prophets, now fulfilled in Christ. People, places and events found in the Old Testament can be seen as types or patterns of what is to come, like a mould which will form and shape what is to come. Jesus then is the antitype, the fulfilment of what those people, places and events act as precursors to.

Matthew takes time to explicitly show how the events around Nazareth, Jerusalem and Bethlehem fulfilled Scripture with the frequent refrain of “This was to fulfil...” followed by a quote. We have seen how Matthew understood the Holy Family’s flight to and return from Egypt as fulfilling “Out of Egypt I have called my Son.”¹³ Jesus is the true and better Israel and in him, we experience a greater exodus from our exile.¹⁴

Where Luke records Gabriel’s appearance to Mary, Matthew focuses on Joseph. Aware of Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph, who is described like Zechariah and righteous is troubled. He does not want to harm Mary but also he does not think he can go through with a marriage which will involve an illegitimate child. His intention is to have a quiet divorce. This would make it clear that the child was not his, that he was not guilty of sin whilst avoiding the death penalty for Mary, an act of mercy. Perhaps he also hoped that this would lead to the child’s father stepping in and enabling Mary to marry him.

However, Gabriel appears to him and cautions him against this course of action. Joseph should go ahead with his marriage because the baby is from God. It is here that Matthew explains that the virgin birth fulfils Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, that a virgin will conceive.

There are two things to take into account when looking at how Matthew takes up Isaiah’s words. First, Isaiah’s original prophecy in Hebrew was simply that a young women would conceive. Whilst it might be possible to interpret that narrowly as referring to a virgin, the wording in Hebrew does not require us to.

Secondly, and I think the two points link, we are not meant to take Isaiah 7:14 out of context as a proof text about Jesus’ birth. That’s not how Isaiah intended it, nor how it would have been heard for the 700 years in between and I don’t think it is how Matthew intends us to see it either.

In Isaiah 7, the prophet goes to see the King and offers him a sign. King Ahaz is not interested in a sign from God, perhaps wanting to appear pious, he actually betrays his arrogance and contempt for

¹³ Matthew 2:15.

¹⁴ See Blomberg, “Matthew” Pages 1-110 in A Commentary on The New Testament Use of the Old Testament (Eds Beale & Carson. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2007), 7-8.

God. So, Isaiah says that Ahaz will still get his sign but it looks like he is not going to like it. Judgement will come and the sign of this will be the seemingly unexpected birth of a child.

The prophecy will have had an immediate fulfilment in Ahaz's time. However, what we pick up is that this and other Old Testament prophecies, as well as promising something immediate were intended to point forward, typologically to show how God's greater purpose would be fulfilled. If God's plans for Judah would be indicated by the arrival of an unexpected baby in the royal court, then God's greater plan for all people would be marked by the arrival of an unexpected baby. If the first child symbolised God's presence with us through the name Immanuel, then this child would be the true and better Immanuel. In this child God would be truly with us. The true and better child of a young woman therefore is the son of a virgin as the Greek translators, wittingly or unwittingly picked up.¹⁵

This is something we will pick up as we read through the Gospels, whether made explicit by Matthew's citation of prophecy and John's theological reflection or perhaps more implicitly in Luke and Mark's selection of material and wording, until Luke 24, where Jesus makes the point explicitly clear, the whole of Scripture has been pointing us towards Jesus.

Practically, this should help us to know how to read and preach the Old Testament. We will want to give it our diligent attention because it is pertinent to us. We will read, preach and teach it Christologically, as pointing towards Christ and the Gospels. This is true whether we are looking at part of the law, a prophetic book, the history of Israel, a list of names or numbers and the Psalms and Proverbs.

¹⁵ Cf. Blomberg, "Matthew", 3-5.

4 Song

The birth and infancy narratives in Luke's Gospel are punctuated by 4 songs. First Mary responds to her meeting with Elizabeth with what has become known as "The Magnificat" which seeks to magnify Yahweh (1:46-56), then Zechariah sings prophetically following the birth of John (1:68-79). Angels sing after the announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherd (2:14) and Simeon sings his prayer "Let your servant depart in peace" after meeting the infant Messiah in the temple (2:29-32). Just as the Psalms provide the foundation for Christian worship today, so too, these songs and prayers have been used in prayer and worship through the centuries particularly in more liturgical traditions.

Again, the songs tie the Gospel firmly into the redemptive history and Scripture. Adam's response to the creation of Eve is to sing of his love, Miriam leads the people in singing and dancing after crossing the Red Sea, the Psalms of David often follow significant events whether the defeat of enemies or David's own conviction of sin.

4.1 Read Luke 1:46-56

Mary's response is to praise God, to declare his greatness. This is something that wells up from deep within her soul. She rejoices (v46). Although she takes on that description of blessed, it is not that she has been favoured because she deserved it due to status or good works. God has in his grace lifted her out of her lowly, humble state and chosen to honour her (v47-49). This is of course what God does with humanity, generally and what he specifically does for, in and through Christ.¹⁶

Mary recognised that this is grace and mercy and if she has benefit specifically, it is something God does more widely. His mercy is generational (v50). He does mighty things, usually a reference to signs and miracles as well as the defeat of enemies (v51). This is the God who humbles the proud whilst lifting up the poor, hungry, needy and humble, another Biblical theme (v52-53).

God's power, grace and salvation are specifically seen in his relationship to his people, Israel, Abraham's heirs (v54-55). Notice that there is an exclusiveness to God's love and grace, it is specifically given for and through God's people. This is seen up until this point in Scripture in terms of God's covenant relationship with Israel and the Jews. It is important too not to see the church as a replacement for Israel, for God's people. Rather, Romans 9-11 talks about Gentile believers as grafted into true Israel, which has always been about the promise and faith. It is in Christ that all God's people are saved, restored, blessed. The Gospel therefore also points to an inclusivity when we describe God's love, grace and mercy because it is for all peoples, everywhere at all times.

Mary stays with Elizabeth for a further three months until going home. This may suggest that she was present for John's birth (v56).

4.2 Read Luke 1:57-63

Elizabeth's due date arrives and she gives birth. Her neighbours share in her joy, recognising that God has been merciful to her. It is important to recognise that the people of Jesus' day were not incredulous, they didn't just believe anything could happen. They may not have had modern scientific textbooks but they knew their biology. They knew that older people didn't suddenly get

¹⁶ C.f. Psalm 8.

pregnant, nor virgins, just as they knew that people didn't get better from sickness by themselves or rise from the dead (v57-58).

The Jewish custom was to circumcise male babies on the 8th day by removing the foreskin, a tradition that went back all the way to Abraham who had been circumcised as an adult to symbolise God's covenant with him. The circumcision also appears to have acted as an naming ceremony. When the people gather for Zechariah and Elizabeth's son's circumcision and naming, they expect him to take his dad's name, or at least one common within his family and clan. However, Elizabeth insists that he is to be called John (v59-61).

When Elizabeth is not heard or believed, Zechariah writes down that the baby's name is John. It is at this point that God gives him his speech back (v62 -64). All of these events, Zechariah's muteness, Elizabeth's shock pregnancy and now Zechariah's healing at the time he insists on a unique name, join together to cause the people to be afraid. They recognise that God is at work and is present with John but at this stage they are bewildered, not knowing exactly how God will work through the child (v62-63).

4.3 Read Luke 1:67-80

Zechariah, now begins to prophecy. Note that prior to Pentecost, being filled with the spirit was primarily an occasional marker of a person receiving power from God to speak or prophecy for him (v67). The prophecy takes the form of a poem or song. This was also common to Old Testament prophecy and can be seen by the style and syntax of books like Isaiah and Ezekiel. Additionally, Ezekiel was referred to as a singer of sad songs.¹⁷

The song opens with a declaration of praise. YHWH is the God of Israel and worthy of praise because he has come again to his people to bring redemption. Zechariah recognises the birth of John and assigns that God is present to save (v68). But Zechariah also joins the dots with what has been happening through Mary. God's salvation is coming through David's line (v69).

God's redemptive acts in Zechariah's time through Jesus and John fulfil prophecy (v70). As with the Psalms' Zechariah describes salvation in terms of enemies defeated. It may be that he, like others expected God's mission here to involve the defeat of Roman occupiers, the liberation and reunification of the nation and a restored Davidic dynasty (v71). By delivering his people and re-establishing David's throne, God is remembering and keeping his Covenant promises (v72 -73).

Salvation has a goal. Just as God sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt so that they could worship him, so too, God is now delivering the people in order to serve him. Paul in Ephesians 2:8:10 would echo this theme describing us as "saved by grace for good works". God's people were to be set apart or re-consecrated as holy. Salvation included justification so that they were declared righteous, or having right standing with God through the Covenant (v74-75).

Zechariah now turns his attention specifically to John. He declares that just as God's people generally are set apart to serve God, the child specifically has been called and set apart as a prophet (v76). John will "go before the Lord", in other words, he is to act as a herald, announcing the Lord's coming (v76). John will bring a message of hope by showing people how to find forgiveness for sin (v77).

God's presence to save is likened to the dawn just as Isaiah describes people walking in darkness then seeing a great light¹⁸ and John names Jesus as the light of the world which the darkness cannot

¹⁷ Ezekiel 33:30-33.

¹⁸ Isaiah 9:2.

overcome.¹⁹ We often think of “light” imagery in the Gospels as referring to life, healing, goodness and guidance. However, we may also do well to see it as simply pointing to a new day and a new start for God’s people.

“Weeping lasts for the night but joy comes in the morning.”²⁰

John grows up, not just physically strong but spiritually mature and resilient too. He then heads out into the wilderness region around the Jordan until his public ministry begins. In so doing, he retraces the steps of Israel through the Exodus and into the promised land. He also literally leads the way in front of the Lord as Jesus too will spend time in the wilderness prior to his mission beginning (v80).

4.4 Glorify God and enjoy him forever

The Westminster Shorter Catechism famously begins with the question “What is the chief end (purpose/goal) of man (humanity)?” The response comes “To glorify God and enjoy him forever.” We see this modelled in Luke 1. The response of God’s people to good news and salvation is always joy, song and praise. Our own response to the good news should first and foremost be joyful worship.

¹⁹ John 1:4-5.

²⁰ Psalm 30:5.

5 Arrival

Matthew and Luke both provide accounts of Jesus' birth with Luke going on to provide further detail about his infancy up until the age of 12. Whilst Mark and John do not include such narratives, John does make this brief but theologically explosive statement.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."²¹

The imagery there is of one pitching a tent, just as the Israelites did whilst out in the Wilderness. "The Word has been introduced as one who was both "with God" and "was God" and the one through whom "all things were made."²²

If Luke and Matthew narrate the events of the Incarnation, John introduces us to the concept of it. This was not just a miraculous conception, Christ is fully human but more than human. In the person of Jesus, God himself came live among us. By describing "The Word" as both God and with God, John specifies that it is The Son, the second person of the Trinity who has come to be Emmanuel, God with us. Christ's sonship and the first person as Father become dominant themes in his Gospel.

5.1 Read Luke 2:1-7

"In those days" is a similar form of introduction to "In the days of", which as we have seen link's Luke's account to Old Testament Scripture. Nolland sees the phrase as also suggesting prophetic fulfilment.²³ Augustus Ceasar calls a census that affects "the entire world" or the known civilised world of the Roman Empire.²⁴ Nolland suggests that rather than Augustus setting out one single event, Empire wide census that there were multiple such administrative events around the empire throughout his reign, reflecting an overarching policy²⁵. The way in which an emperor is used to further God's purposes echoes the way in which, according to Isaiah, Cyrus is used to accomplish God's purposes in bringing the people back from exile (v1).

Quirinius carried out a census when he was governor of Syria in 6AD but this would be later than Jesus birth given that Herod the Great was still alive and reigning.²⁶ However, we know that he had military responsibility in the region from 10-7BC²⁷ and that Augustus called the people of the Empire to swear allegiance to him around about that time which might fit with a census (v2).²⁸

The Jewish tradition was to register in your ancestral home town, so Joseph sets off to Bethlehem, the birthplace of his ancestor, David.²⁹ He goes with the pregnant Mary who he I betrothed to (v3-5). It is whilst they are there that her due date arrives and she gives birth to the baby. She swaddles him and places him in a manger. The word often translated "inn" most likely indicates the guest room in a family house. So it is unlikely that they were turned away from various inns by the angry innkeepers of nativity play folklore. Instead, the birth most likely took place in the family home. The main living

²¹ John 1:14.

²² John 1:1-3.

²³ Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 105.

²⁴ Bock, *Luke 1-9:50* (BECNT. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic), 202.

²⁵ Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 105.

²⁶ Morris, *Luke* (TNTC 3.2nd Edition. Repr. 2008. Nottingham. IVP, 1988), 99.

²⁷ Morris, *Luke*, 99.

²⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xvii.42.

²⁹ Bock, *Luke 1-9:50*, 202.

area would have been shared with animals with sleeping quarters for humans on a raised platform. If the house was a little full, with various family members registering, then others may have taken precedence in terms of the best room, even to an expectant mother, especially if that expectant mother potentially carried a level of shame. A feeding trough proves a natural crib (v6-7).

So, whilst it is probable that some stigma was involved and this may have affected Mary's treatment, the circumstances do not point us towards the traditional image of a family turned away and left out in the cold because there was no room. Whilst this may not fit with some of our more sentimental Gospel appeals, it does point us to a saviour born in the centre of the action amongst the hustle and bustle, joy and sadness, busyness and mess of everyday family life.

5.2 Read Luke 2:8-21

As the baby is born, normal life is continuing all around. Up in the hills around Bethlehem were shepherds, bringing their sheep into the sheepfolds, counting them in and setting watch for the night (v8). An angel appears, we are not told if it is the same angel, Gabriel, who had appeared to Zechariah, Mary and Joseph. His appearance terrifies them (v9).

Again, the message follows a pattern. They are reassured with the command "don't be afraid." They are told that the angel brings good news not bad news or judgement. The substance of the message is announced, the promised baby, a saviour is born. They are given a sign, the location and circumstances of the birth, (v10-12). As with Zechariah and Mary, there is an emphasis on this being good news, a cause for joy not just to the immediate hearers but for all the people. "The people" here referring to God's people, in other words to Israel. However, we can read that description of "all the people" inclusively, not that it is a vague reference to all humanity everywhere but that Gentile believers in Jesus are ingrafted into Israel.³⁰

The angel is joined by a chorus of angels singing or speaking praise. They express glory to God and express desire for peace both peace for God and humanity or between God and humanity. Again, it is specifically favoured humanity. To understand what it means to be favoured, we need look no further than Mary. Those who are favoured are those whom God chooses by grace to reveal his will to and include in his purposes (v13-14).

The shepherds confer with one another and agree to obey the angel. They head for Bethlehem where they find the baby. The sign proves good and true (v15-16). They leave, reporting what they have seen to anyone they meet. Meanwhile, Mary observes, reflects and remembers. No doubt she will be one of the key sources for later Gospel writers (v17-21).

We often move from verse 20 to verse 22 but Luke includes a further detail. The baby is circumcised and named, just like John had been, on the eighth day. This incidental detail demonstrates that even in the minutia, Jesus is completely obedient to the Covenant's requirements (v21).

5.3 Read 2:13-40

The next significant marker in Jesus' early life came around the 40 days mark with his first visit to the Temple in Jerusalem. This marked two things. First, the mother was classified as ritually unclean after her child was born. This lasted for one week when she had to remain in seclusion until the boy was circumcised. In lieu of circumcision, if the baby was a girl, then the mother remained in

³⁰ C.f. Romans 11.

seclusion for a further week. Then 33 days after circumcision or 80 days after a girl was born, she was to make an offering in order to be declared clean again.³¹

Moses had required the firstborn sons to be consecrated or set apart for God after the crossing of the Red Sea. This recognised that the firstborn's life had been forfeit under the last plague in Egypt. The Passover sacrifice had given the life of those children back and so, this was a statement that the eldest boy belonged to Yahweh. It also aligned with the offering of first fruits to the Lord. Usually, this was a ceremonial act with no further practical implications, however, in Hannah's case, Samuel's consecration was a literal offering of her Son back into Tabernacle service.³²

So, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to the Temple in Jerusalem and offered sacrifices. That they opted for pigeons or doves indicates that they were not well off and so unable to afford a lamb³³ This may have reflected their longer term family circumstances but if Joseph was a craftsman with a business, it is also possible that they were suffering shorter term or more recent hardship due to a loss of work, perhaps partly through the shame of the pre-marital pregnancy and partly the disruption of having to go to Bethlehem to register and then remain there with the baby for a time (v22-24).

Whilst at the Temple, they encounter two people who recognise Jesus for who he is, God's anointed saviour. Simeon is described as righteous, a devout man with spiritual insight. He was longing for "the consolation of Israel", in other words, the comfort promised in Isaiah 40 when the nation would be fully forgiven her past sins and Exile could be described as truly complete, not only with a physical return to the land but a restoration of the kingdom under David's successor, free from external oppression. The Holy Spirit had told him that he would live to see the day when the Messiah came. Something had prompted him to go to the Temple that day. Luke tells us that it was the Holy Spirit (v25-27).

Simeon takes the baby in his arms to bless him and then prays. He recognises that the promise has been fulfilled and announces that he is now ready to die in peace, knowing that God's Word has come true. Although this does not mean he was necessarily, it is generally assumed that he was. He says that he has seen God's salvation and echoing Isaiah describes Jesus and God's salvation in him as "a light to the Gentiles." By this, he means that God's will and purpose will be revealed to all nations through Jesus but at this stage, the focus of salvation and glory is on the people of Israel (v28-32).

Simeon also blesses Mary and Joseph before prophesying that Jesus's life will bring disruption and upheaval. "The rising and falling of many" reflects previous language about the proud being humbled and the poor raised up. There is a darker, sombre element to this too "a sword will pierce your heart" speaks of coming grief and tragedy (v33-35).

Anna is another prophet present at the Temple. She had been widowed young but was now 84 years old. She had devoted perhaps 60 years of her life to prayer and worship in the Temple. She sees the family and comes over to them. She too prays, giving thanks. She then goes away telling others about him. Note, that she singles out those "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." Again, the language of Jerusalem's redemption echoes Isaiah which treats Zion or Jerusalem as representative of all God's people.(v35-38). Luke then brings to a close the nativity, telling us that Jesus' family

³¹ Leviticus 12:1-8.

³² Exodus 13:1-2.

³³ Leviticus 12:8.

returned to Galilee. Jesus is described as growing into physical, mental and spiritual maturity (v39-40).

5.4 Another visit and an excursion

Luke curtails the infancy accounts at 30 days before leaping forward 12 years. Matthew however gives us some further detail. At some point after Jesus' birth, the family receive visitors, magi from the East. The reference to "the East" probably indicates Mesopotamia or Persia rather than East Asia. The indication was that they were astrologers. The visitors take a detour via Jerusalem. They have seen a new star and consider it to be a sign indicating a royal birth in Judea. So, first of all, they go to Jerusalem but there is a problem. There is already a king there, Herod and the last thing he wants is a pretender to his throne, especially one who might claim it as an inheritance, born to the role rather than through appointment, even from Rome.

Herod consults with the religious leaders who refer him to Micah's prophecy. If a descendant of David was going to come from anywhere and seize back the nation for God, then he would show up first in Bethlehem.

The king pretends to want to come and pay homage too. He sends the wise-men ahead first. They are guided by the star and find the house where they offer gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. These are often seen as symbolising kingship, priesthood and sacrifice. Although there were three gifts, contra tradition, we are not told how many wise-men there were and they are never identified as kings.

God warns the wise-men not to return to Herod and also tells Joseph in a dream to flee. Herod sends his henchmen to Bethlehem but is too late. Incidentally, whilst this incident is often referred to as "the massacre of the innocents", the number of under twos in the town would have been small. Joseph takes his family to Egypt and when Herod dies, returns but to be on the safe side, he goes straight back to Nazareth, not to Bethlehem or Jerusalem.

Although traditional nativity images often portray the wise-men arriving on the same night as the shepherds, it is generally agreed that they came later. Although it does not need to have been much later. It is unlikely that Joseph and Mary would have risked a trip to Jerusalem after their visit, so it must have been at least 40 days after Jesus' birth. However, though much has been made of them living in a house, this doesn't add detail once we realise that the stable scene is also probably a later addition. Furthermore, Herod may have required his men to kill anyone under 2 to be on the safe side but this does not mean that the child had reached his second birthday. So, the magi may have visited anytime between the purification ceremony and Jesus' 2nd birthday.³⁴

5.5 Read Luke 2:41-52

Twelve years after the first visit to Jerusalem, Jesus returns with his family as part of one of the pilgrimages. Jesus would have been approaching his bar mitzva, when at thirteen, he would be morally and legally responsible as a Jewish man. The journey to Jerusalem may have reflected an intensification of preparation for those vows(v41-42).³⁵ His mum and dad then set off back for Nazareth, assuming Jesus is somewhere with the other pilgrims, perhaps travelling with other young lads of his age. However, they soon realise he is not and return to Jerusalem, spending 3 days searching for him. I suspect that the number of days is not incidental (v43-46).

³⁴ See Matthew 2:1-23.

³⁵ Bock, Luke 1:1-9:50, 264.

They find him in reasoned debate and discussion, astounding the religious leaders. Mary reprimands him “We were worried” but Jesus reminds them that his true Father is God and so they should not be surprised to find him in his Father’s house, doing his father’s work. However, he returns obediently with them to Nazareth (v47-51) Luke reiterates again that Jesus is growing to physical, mental and spiritual maturity (v52).

5.6 The promise of the Ages

The birth accounts in Matthew and Luke, combined with John’s reflections present Jesus as the fulfilment of God’s covenant promises. The focus is very much on him as the hope and salvation of his own people but there are already indications that God’s purposes extend wider than one nation. There is light to the Gentiles and this results as promised by the prophets in those who know coming to Jerusalem and then Bethlehem in response to God’s sign.

Luke’s intention was that his readers would grow in assurance of the truthfulness of claims concerning Jesus both in terms of the historicity of the claims and in his identity as saviour and messiah. This is achieved here, first by the way in which Luke is clearly drawing on eye witness accounts. We are meant to infer that some of those people who witnessed things, Mary, shepherds, guests at John’s naming etc had shared their accounts with Luke and his other sources. Angelic announcement adds further confirmation, particularly to the identity of Jesus.

Luke alludes then to Jesus’ divinity through the virgin birth and his identification as the father’s Son. John makes this point more overtly. However, Luke’s description of Jesus growing in maturity and the insight into his childhood remind us that just as he is fully God, he is also fully man, as Carson observes,

“If the evangelist had said only that the eternal word assumed manhood or adopted the form of a body, the reader steeped in the popular dualism of the Hellenistic world might have missed the point. But John is unambiguous, almost shocking in the expression he uses.”³⁶

We are not meant to think of God, or some spiritual being appearing in human form. The Word really does become flesh. This was important because some were tempted to think of Jesus as not truly human but only giving the appearance as in Docetism and some examples of Gnostic thinking. Meanwhile, even still, some early Christians talked in terms of Jesus as having a divine spirit and human body but “becoming flesh” suggests more than this. He takes to himself a full human nature and so in one person has two natures and therefore two wills.

At the same time, the emphasis in the Gospels on Jesus as “God with us” and Luke taking time to insist on the virgin birth make clear that he was truly, fully God. His divinity isn’t lost or diminished in the incarnation. So it is important to recognise that whilst John says “The Word became flesh” he doesn’t talk about God becoming a man in a way that might suggest that God changed in the incarnation.

This is important because if some people wanted to diminish his humanity by arguing that Jesus only appeared to be human, there has also been a long history of people attempting to deny his deity. If the most obvious example of this was Arianism and its successor heresies, others talked in terms of Jesus’ human and divine nature becoming mixed together in order to create a third entity.

³⁶ DA Carson, John, 126.

Meanwhile another attack on his full divinity can be seen in the Kenosis theory, which based on a misunderstanding of Philippians 2 suggests that Jesus emptied himself of his very Godness.

5.7 Fully God and fully man

This leads to an important aspect of Systematic Theology or Doctrine: Christology and the Incarnation. The Gospels are of course not offering us a technical theological text book and we need the help of wider Scripture to answer some questions that we might have. However, we can note what the Gospels are careful to say and not say.

For example, when John sums up the incarnation with the words “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”³⁷

³⁷ John 1:14,

6 Heralded

The sudden appearance of John on the scene, proclaiming a message of repentance is captured by all of the Gospel writers.³⁸ John introduces his namesake as the first significant event in his Gospel. He portrays those coming to him as curious and trying to identify him. It seemed that an Old Testament figure had re-emerged from the past. Many identified John with Elijah who had been notably taken straight to Heaven without dying. John's appearance and demeaner also seemed to imitate Elijah's. Could the prophet from Ahab's day have returned in effect to take up a similar role towards a similar northern king in Herod?³⁹ This would fit with Malachi's prophecy.⁴⁰

John's emergence as a prophet was also significant because although there were clearly people around who prophesied such as Anna, the kind of prophetic ministry associated with Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah seemed to have declined or even disappeared. There certainly hadn't been serious Scriptural revelation for 400 years.

6.1 Read Luke 3:1-20

Luke sets the events in historical context by reference to four key rulers, it's 15 years into Tiberius Caesar's reign whilst Pilate is the governor of Judea and the Herodian dynasty, the brothers Herod and Philip controlling the north of the region. The High priests were Annas and Caiaphas. Note that the two seemed to overlap a little with the son taking over formally as High Priest from his father who retained a lot of influence. At this point, God gives John a prophetic message to proclaim. Note that as well as dating the events historically, Luke's introduction here also echoes the way in which Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah were introduced v1-2). John begins preaching a message of repentance and baptism in the Jordan region (v3).

Each of the Gospel writers agree that John's ministry is a fulfilment of Isaiah 40:3-8.⁴¹ The prophet described someone crying out, the focus is on the voice, suggesting someone who seeks little attention or power for themselves and is willing to be a mere voice or herald. The cry was a call to prepare for a royal visit. Just as you might fill in potholes and prepare roads for the visit of a dignitary today, so in Isaiah and John's day. However, preparations were on a more cosmic scale when the king of kings visited. It wasn't just about repairing roads and rebuilding paths, no such a visit would require the levelling out of the entire country surrounding Jerusalem creating a gigantic highway for the Messiah. This language is used metaphorically by John, it's not remodelling of the Judean countryside that is required but changed hearts. Again, the imagery encourages us to think of the proud brought low and the humble raised up. In other words a right heart attitude forsakes both pride, the belief that you are worthy in your own right and false humility or pity which fails to recognise the grace of God poured out in your life giving you a new status, declaring you righteous (v4-6). Observant readers will note that it is only Luke who gives the full quote. This may be intended to emphasise the raising up and lowering, restoring and humbling.

The crowds come to be baptised by John. However, he will not accept mere ritual nor verbal profession. He insists that their lives must change to show "fruit of repentance. This is not just a kind of get out jail free card available to them on the basis of ethnic descent from Abraham. In fact, their repentance is meant to demonstrate that they cannot rely on their ancestral heritage. The warning

³⁸ C.f. Mark 1:2-8 & Matthew 3:1-12.

³⁹ John 1:19-28.

⁴⁰ Malachi 4:5.

⁴¹ Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:2-3. John 1:23 puts Isaiah's words directly into John the Baptist's mouth.

is that judgement is coming. If Israel had been pictured as a tree or vine in the prophetic books then God was now visiting to see if his people, if his tree was bearing fruit or not (v7-9).

When the people ask him what “fruit of repentance” looked like in practice, John urged them to act justly and fairly, not to oppress or extort the vulnerable but to do good to those in need, sharing clothes and food with the poor. In other words, they were to obey God’s law, particularly as described in Leviticus 19:13-18. Those responding to John included native Jews and soldiers in the service of the Romans and Herod (v10-18).

There was one person in particular who was not happy with John. Herod was in an adulterous relationship with his brother’s wife, Herodias and John rebuked him for this. As a result, Herod had him arrested and imprisoned.

6.2 Read Luke 3:21-38

Jesus also comes out to meet John and be baptised by him. Luke follows Mark’s account closely, keeping the details brief. The key differences are that Luke removes Mark’s reference to Jesus coming from Nazareth, a redundant detail given that Luke has already placed Jesus there.

Additionally, where Mark focuses on Jesus himself seeing heaven open, Luke simply describes the event as happening (v21).⁴² Matthew at this point includes a conversation between John and Jesus. The baptiser is reluctant to baptise in this case seeing Jesus as greater and therefore the one who should baptise him. Jesus insists, explaining that this is “to fulfil righteousness.”⁴³

As the heavens open, God’s spirit is seen to descend on Jesus in the form of a dove. Who is the sign for? Well whilst Luke talks in general terms, Mark’s indication that Jesus saw it and John’s testimony that he had seen it happen and heard the voice from heaven suggest that eye witnesses may have been a small, select group.⁴⁴ This was not a sign to convince sceptics but an encouragement for Jesus himself and assurance to those already speaking for him. The Father speaks to the Son making this a Trinitarian moment. He declares that Jesus is his beloved son and that he is pleased with him. Spot the echo here from Genesis 22:2 where God describes Isaac as Abraham’s only beloved son (v22).

This moment seems intended to confirm and commission Jesus’ own public ministry. Luke tells us that he was about thirty years old at this stage (v23a). Luke then provides a family tree of Jesus to show his lineage back through David, Judah, Jacob and Abraham. Matthew begins his Gospel with a similar genealogy, although his begins with Abraham and works forwards to Jesus. There are some differences between the lines which may either indicate that one focuses on the maternal line and the other through Joseph, or alternatively may indicate the presence of levirate marriages in the family tree with one genealogy recording the actual physical ancestor and the other identifying the deceased husband who a younger brother had stepped in for ((v23b-38).

Matthew divides his genealogy into 3 groups of 14 generations. Tom Wright’s suggestion that we should double this up to give us 6 groups of seven generations followed by Jesus as the 7th linking to Daniel’s seven weeks, or seven times seven as a Jubilee is intriguing but ultimately speculative.⁴⁵ We should observe the patterns provided explicitly for us in the Gospels rather than reading into them

⁴² Mark 1:9-10.

⁴³ Matthew 3:14-15).

⁴⁴ John 1:32-34.

⁴⁵ Tom Wright, *How God became King, Getting to the Heart of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 2012), 71. C.f. Daniel 9:1-3;20-24.

(eisegesis) things we would like to see. However, what Matthew does do is to punctuate his list at three vital historical points:

1. David
2. Exile
3. The Messiah

These are the key moments in the history of God's people as Abraham's offspring. David is God's archetypal king and demonstrates what it means to live as God's people, in God's land, under his rule and blessing, fulfilling the promise to Abraham of a land, descendants (a people) and blessing. The exile marks God's judgement and shows that whilst significant, David was not the final fulfilment of the promise that all people would be blessed by, through and in Abraham's offspring. It is Jesus, identified here as the Messiah who fulfils that.⁴⁶

Luke takes us all the way back to Adam and then declares that he was "the son of God" (v38). The concluding line of the chapter identifying Adam as "God's Son" should then be read in conjunction with the heavenly declaration that Jesus was God's beloved son. Jesus's sonship in the Gospels indicates divine identity but also tells us something about his humanity. Adam, made in God's image was in a sense his son, just as the people of Israel are described as the Son.⁴⁷ If Adam lost that right to be called "Son" through sin, then in Christ, rightful human sonship is restored.

6.3 Pointing to Jesus

John's Gospel, attributed to John the Evangelist and traditionally presumed to be the work of the disciple/apostle named John (so not to be confused with John the Baptist), also records that John specifically identified and pointed out Jesus to his disciples causing some of them to start following Jesus instead of him.⁴⁸

The Baptist sees Jesus and says:

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"⁴⁹

speaking to Andrew and another tells them:

"Look, the Lamb of God!"⁵⁰

John's language alludes to the lambs and goats used in the sacrificial system, possibly combining the imagery of a sin offering with that of the scapegoat, driven out of the camp or city to represent sin being removed from God's people.

⁴⁶ Matthew 1:17.

⁴⁷ Hosea 11:1.

⁴⁸ John 1:29-42.

⁴⁹ John 1:29

⁵⁰ John 1:36.

7 The Exodus revisited

After his baptism, Jesus goes into the wilderness or desert region around the Jordan river. He spends forty days there, fasting and experiencing temptation from Satan. Mark sums this up in a few lines:

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted⁵¹ by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.⁵¹

Both Matthew and Luke flesh things out in a bit more detail by describing three specific temptations Jesus faced towards the end. This may suggest that whilst the whole experience was intended to test or prove Jesus, that Jesus was not in continuous dialogue with Satan throughout.

7.1 Read Luke 4:1-13.

Jesus leaves the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit. Prior to Pentecost, the term “full of the Spirit” or “filled with the Spirit” tends to be used to describe someone set apart and anointed for God’s service at a specific time. Jesus of course fits the bill as the anointed one but also there is an added dynamic here, first in that there has been a description of the specific event where the Holy Spirit fills him at his baptism. Secondly, theologically, this is about more than a human anointing but a union of the persons of the Trinity.

Doctrinally, this is described as “perichoresis” meaning that each of the persons of the Trinity, mutually indwell one another. This means that wherever one person of the Trinity is present, all are present. This links to the Doctrine of Inseparable Operation. This means that the persons are united in doing everything together. It is not that the Father does one thing and the Son another.

Jesus goes into the wilderness or desert where he spends 40 days experiencing testing and temptation. During that time, he chooses to fast, to go without food, being fully human, this causes him to experience serious hunger (v2). So, unsurprisingly, the devil’s first temptation is to call on Jesus to use his power to turn stones into bread. We might see nothing wrong of this in itself but Jesus recognises it as temptation. Some have suggested that the temptation was to get Jesus to use his power selfishly for himself and there is perhaps some truth in this.

However, the text itself is best placed to explain what the temptation was and this can be seen from Jesus’ response. Jesus says that humans weren’t meant to just depend on bread or food to live but on God’s Word. In other words, the temptation was to do with who, or what did Jesus rely on. By choosing to fast, he was indicating that he was dependent solely on God for the resources he needed for the period of testing. Of course he needed food to live, physically but he needed more than food and his fasting symbolically reflected that (v3-4).

The second and third temptations are reversed in Matthew’s Gospel. Here, the second temptation is to worship Satan in order to receive authority over the surrounding nations. On one we might argue that this wasn’t in Satan’s gift anyway and of course, Jesus had true authority over those kingdoms. However, Satan does have a level of authority and control over people and places, so this was what he was offering. Alert readers may also observe that Jesus’ refusal to bow to Satan in order to receive kingdoms compares unfavourably with the Herodian dynasty who were willing to bow to the Emperor in Rome in order to receive their kingdoms. Jesus rebukes Satan with the reminder that we should only worship the Lord (v5-8).

⁵¹ Mark 1: 12-13.

In the third temptation, Satah urges Jesus to throw himself from a high tower in the temple, promising angelic protect. Jesus rebukes him, insisting that Scripture tells us not to test God. In other words, we are not meant to demand proof from God of his love and care for us, putting his love and his sovereignty to the test (v9-12).

The devil realises he has failed on this occasion and leaves Jesus alone for the time being (v13).

7.2 Recapitulation

One word used to describe what Jesus does in his earthly ministry is “recapitulation”. When you recapitulate, you restate it in summary. Jesus’ life can be said to “sum” up the history of God’s people. Jesus becomes the true and better Israel, God’s Son. Where Israel had been the disobedient son, failing God by rebelling in the wilderness, putting YHWH to the test, whilst failing their own test, Jesus is the obedient Son, his baptism recapitulates the Red Sea crossing and so his 40 days in the wilderness echo the 40 years that the people spent there. Unlike the Hebrews of the Exodus, though, Jesus, even though he experiences severe hunger doesn’t put God to the test. He knows that God can provide food like the manna his forefathers ate but he does not need to force the Father’s hand, trusting him to provide what is needed. He knows the Father will protect him and so doesn’t need that proven and he knows that he will receive his inheritance so does not need to use underhanded means to gain false authority and power.

7.3 Joshua

The location of these events at the Jordan river also points us to Jesus as the true and better Joshua. Later we will see him as the true and better Moses when he delivers the Sermon on the Mount. At this point in the story, it is John who represents Moses as the one who calls the people out from their spiritual Egypt and urges repentance in relationship to the Law. It is Jesus (an anglicised version of the Greek form of Joshua or Yeshua) who will lead God’s people into their promised rest as they come to enjoy the inheritance of God’s kingdom.

8. The Preacher

Jesus' baptism and temptation mark the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus returns from the Jordan river and begins preaching, visiting synagogues on the Sabbath and addressing the crowds which begin to be drawn to him as he starts to do miraculous signs and heal the sick.⁵²

Note that Matthew specifically links this with John's imprisonment. Jesus saw this as the sign that the reins had been handed over, John had completed his task of preparing the way.⁵³ Matthew also treats this as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of light coming to the Gentiles.

We might also see this as another example of recapitulation. Just as the people of Israel took possession of the land, conquering the towns and cities after crossing the Jordan after their time in the wilderness, so Jesus tours the land announcing the arrival of God's new kingdom.

8.1 God's Kingdom draws near

A frequent image in the Gospels is of the drawing near or arrival of God's kingdom. Matthew often refers to it as the Kingdom of Heaven. This is not to associate it with a particular location in the cosmos. Rather, Jewish sensibilities meant that rather than referring to God directly, especially by the name YHWH, Jews would often use an associated term instead. Matthew no doubt writing with a particularly Jewish audience in mind, follows this pattern whereas Luke and Mark seem to have expected a more Gentile readership.

There has been much discussion about what John and Jesus meant when they said "the kingdom has drawn near." Should we think of God's kingdom as already here or still on its way. I think we can get ourselves tied up in knots over this and terms like "inaugurated kingdom". The point is that "God's kingdom" is a reference to his rule and reign, his presence to guide, protect and provide for his people. So, God's kingdom is wherever he is present with his people.

This means that the kingdom drew near with Jesus because he had drawn near. God's kingdom was present in him. Similarly, we can talk about God's kingdom drawing near and being here today through the Holy Spirit baptised church.

At the same time, Jesus' prayer "may your kingdom come, let your will be done" suggests an ongoing expectation for more. God's kingdom will grow both as more people put their faith in Jesus and as his people become more Christlike. The fullest realisation of his kingdom will be seen when Jesus physically returns.

8.2 Read Luke 4:16-30

The next town on route is Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. Interestingly, it does not look like Jesus made this his base or even the starting point for his ministry. He seems to have operated more out of Capernaum. It seems that Jesus regularly took the opportunity to read and comment on the Scripture reading for that day v16-17a).

On this occasion he reads from Isaiah, the passage which begins "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." In that prophecy, Isaiah was announcing that he was commissioned to preach good news of liberty from oppression and captivity, restoration and prosperity for the poor and healing for the sick. These

⁵² Matthew 4:12-17, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:14-15.

⁵³ Matthew 4:12.

words may be seen as doing two things, first they reflect Sabbath/Jubilee language. Every seven years and every 50 years, slaves were set free and debts cancelled.⁵⁴ Secondly, Isaiah might be seen as pointing to the joy and blessing of an end to exile, captivity and oppression from foreign rulers. Jesus states clearer that these things are fulfilled with his arrival (v17b-21).

The people respond positively to Jesus words. However, it seems that Jesus recognises that they haven't really heard and understood what he is saying. So he goes on to provoke them. First he suggests that they will demand that he uses his power to heal himself, secondly he quotes the saying that a prophet is without honour in their own town. He also reminds them that in history, it often wasn't God's people Israel that benefited from his blessing under previous prophets and miracle workers. The implication is clear "Yes the prophecy is being fulfilled but you are not going to be the beneficiaries."

This is the point at which things turn ugly and the crowd turn on Jesus. They push him out of the synagogue and seek to kill him but are unable to. Jesus walks away completely unscathed (v22-30).

8.3 Read Luke 4:31-39.

Jesus moves on to Capernaum, another Galilean town. This seems to be Simon Peter's hometown and it looks like this becomes Jesus' base. One again, he is teaching on the Sabbath and impresses the people with his authoritative nature. Once again there is an opportunity to heal. This time, the problem is that someone in the Synagogue is demonised, under the influence and control of an evil spirit. The spirit cries out, pleading with Jesus to go away and leave the demons alone. It states recognition of Jesus as God's holy one (v31-34). Jesus commands the Spirit to depart from the man and it does (v35). This causes further astonishment among the onlookers as it demonstrates again the authority that Jesus has, not just in human matters but over the spirit world (v36). News about Jesus continues to spread (v37).

Jesus goes straight from the synagogue to Simon Peter's house. Peter's mother-in-law is sick and so he asks Jesus to heal her. Jesus heals her. Fascinatingly, the word used to describe Jesus getting up and leaving the synagogue is "anastasis", which is the same root word for resurrection (v38-39).

8.4 Read Luke 4: 40-44

Evening draws in and a crowd turn up. There are many who are sick and Jesus heals them. It is possible that they waited until sunset because they observed the Sabbath from sunset on the Friday to sunset on the Saturday. Jesus heals all those who are ill (v40). He also casts out demons but instructs them to be silent about his identity. Jesus will not accept the false praise and witness of fallen angels (v41).

The next morning, Jesus gets up early and goes by himself to pray. The crowds follow him and try to persuade him to stay in Capernaum but he insists that he must move on to preach the kingdom in other towns. He moves from Galilee down south into Judea, preaching in the synagogues there (v42-44).

⁵⁴ Pao and Schnabel offer a note of caution on placing too much emphasis on "Jubilee" as a "full blown theology" or paradigm linked to the idea of Jubilee doesn't seem to have been present in Judaism at that time. However, he recognises that the themes here do align with what a Jubilee involved. Pao and Schnabel, "Luke", Pages 251 -214 in Pages 1-110 in A Commentary on The New Testament Use of the Old Testament (Eds Beale & Carson. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2007), 7-8.

8.5 Full of the Spirit

Matthew summarises these events with a short description of Jesus' teaching and healing tour.⁵⁵ It seems though that Luke is drawing primarily from Mark's account as a source.⁵⁶ Notice though an important difference. Luke chooses to include the specific details about Jesus' rejection in Nazareth at this point.⁵⁷ This perhaps has a double purpose. First, Luke wants to draw our attention to the way that Jesus was rejected in his own town and by his own people. If one of Luke's aims is to help Gentiles to see that the Good News is for them, then this links into a narrative which will develop in the book of Acts showing how rejection and opposition leads to the good news moving outwards and onwards.

Secondly, Luke wants to draw our attention to Jesus identifying himself with Isaiah's prophecy. So, he emphasises that Jesus returns from the wilderness, "Full of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁸ This does two things, first it reminds us of the unity of the Trinity. The Father, Son and Spirit share in the same mission. Secondly, it points to Jesus in his incarnation depending on the Spirit for power. This will build into a crucial theme in Acts. The Church too will be full of the Spirit and dependent upon him for power.

The Spirit comes upon Jesus at his baptism and leads him into the wilderness. Jesus experience of temptation, struggle and opposition does not lead to him being drained of the Spirit and spiritual power. He returns as full as before. This might help temper any tendency on our part to think in terms of the Holy Spirit being an up and down presence in our life, a kind of spiritual power source or fuel that might need topping up.

⁵⁵ Matthew 4:23-25

⁵⁶ Mark 1:24-35.

⁵⁷ Morris observes that we are not required to assume that this event was chronologically at the start of Jesus' ministry. Indeed, the level of hostility may indicate some prior knowledge of his message and work. However, it does perhaps head up and set the scene for the nature of his ministry and responses to it. See Morris, *Luke*, 124.

⁵⁸ Morris notes that Luke takes a particular interest and places emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Morris, *Luke*, 125.

9 Faith

Jesus' preaching and miracle working is drawing crowds but we also get to see Jesus' interactions with individuals who are called to follow him. How will people respond? The hostility of Scribes and Pharisees is contrasted with the faith of others who believe in Jesus, receive healing and follow him.

9.1 Read Luke 5:1-11

Jesus is teaching beside Lake Galilee, also known as the sea of Gennesaret. There is a large crowd and they are pressing closer and closer to him. To give him more space, he borrows a boat, one of two fishing boats. The owner is Simon Peter and he asks him push the boat out a little way. From this makeshift pulpit, he begins to teach. Notice, that the practice was to teach sitting down rather than the modern Western practice of standing to teach and preach (v1-3).

When he has finished teaching, he speaks to Simon. It seems that the whole purpose of borrowing the boat was to give him this opportunity. He tells Simon to start fishing again. The normal practice was to fish at night and the crews had just got back from a bad night with no fish taking the bait. Simon explains this and yet chooses to obey Jesus, addressing him as "master" (v4-5).

He begins fishing with the help of his crew. The result is incredible, the nets are so full that Simon has to call his friends, James and John in the other boat to help him (v6-7). They are astonished and disturbed by the miracle and Simon urges Jesus to leave him alone. He recognises that Jesus is holy and he sees himself as a sinner, unfit to be in Jesus' presence (v8-10a).

Jesus responds by encouraging them not to be afraid. He has a new job for them. Instead of fishing for fish, they will fish for men. Their response is immediate. They leave everything to follow Jesus (v10b-11).

9.2 Toiling through the night

Whilst it is not the primary point of the passage, I do find great encouragement in Peter's response to Jesus. I'm sure there are many believers who feel like they have been toiling though a nighttime experience without seeing fruit, whether in a local community, their church or with an unbelieving family. The encouragement to go back in there, trusting Jesus to work is something we need to hear sometimes. Or as Psalm 30:5 says:

"Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning"

9.3 Calling disciples

How do you imagine the calling of the first disciples? I think many of us have grown up with the image in our head of Jesus turning up out of the blue, meeting people for the first time and calling them to follow him. They immediately leave behind everything to follow a complete stranger. That gives us quite a romantic image of discipleship and sets up the emotional altar call at an evangelistic event perfectly.

This may also be the impression we would get if we only had Matthew and Mark's accounts. Matthew follows Mark's wording closely and simply describes Jesus walking along the shore of Galilee and calling the four fishermen to leave their nets and follow him.

However, Luke and John help to develop the picture a bit more. John tells us how Simon's brother, Andrew had been among John the Baptist's disciples. When John had pointed out Jesus as "The

Lamb of God", Andrew had gone after Jesus with a friend to investigate further. He had then gone to find Simon. So Simon and Andrew had already met Jesus out by the Jordan.

Luke adds in the further detail that Jesus had commandeered Simon's boat which also points to a prior relationship. No doubt the fishermen had also seen Jesus teaching in the Synagogue and of course Jesus had healed Simon's mother-in-law, though as the Gospel structure is not chronological, we do not know if that was before or after the events by the lake.

This helps us to think a bit more about what discipleship involves. First, we can sum up from John 1 that disciples are people who want to follow Jesus, to be close to him, to know him and who go and bring others to be close to Jesus. Disciples follow Jesus and disciples make more disciples. Secondly, we can see from the accounts put together that discipleship is about a growing and informed relationship with the Lord.

9.4 Read Luke 5:12-16

As Jesus is walking along, he sees a man with leprosy. The man is described as "full of leprosy" indicating that the disease is at an advanced stage. This also contrasts with Jesus who has been described in Luke 4:1 as "full of the Holy Spirit. The man begs Jesus to heal him, first recognising that Jesus is able to heal if he desires (v12). Jesus confirms that he is willing and reaches out to touch him. Notice that both the man and Jesus talk in terms of cleansing rather than just healing. The Jews made a distinction, based on the Law of Moses between things that were clean and unclean. If something was classed as unclean then you were not even to touch it. Leprosy as a contagious illness was classed as "unclean" and so those with it became outcasts, banished from society. Fear of the illness' physical, social and spiritual consequences meant that you kept a distance from lepers but Jesus is willing to come close and touch him (v13).

Jesus instructs the man to go and show himself to the priest as the Torah required. He tells him not to speak about this to others but the man does anyway and so Jesus' reputation grows with more people coming seeking healing. Jesus, whenever he gets the opportunity withdraws from the crowds to pray (v14-16).

9.5 Read Luke 5:17-26

Jesus is teaching in a house. As well as a favourable crowd, there are Pharisees (members of one of the religious sects there and Scribes, those with responsibility for studying and teaching the Law of Moses. The Scribes or teachers of the Law mentioned frequently in association with the Pharisees may have been the scribes and rabbis associated with the Pharisees.⁵⁹ We begin to see through the Gospel that this grouping allies with others to oppose Jesus. They are neither there to be taught or healed but to find fault (v17)

The house is packed out and so when one group of friends turn up carrying their friend who is unable to walk on his mattress, they cannot find a way in. They resort to going up to the flat roof and removing the roofing so that they can lower their friend in. Some have suggested an error in Luke's retelling here and a contradiction with Mark because he describes tiles being removed which would not fit with a traditional Palestinian home and Mark describes the men digging into the roof.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Bock, *Luke 1-9:50*, 479.

⁶⁰ C.f. Mark 2:4.

However, it does seem that external influences meant that some houses were using tiles and Mark does not specific the material on the roof (v18-19).⁶¹

Jesus' speaks to them man but instead of immediately healing him, he suses the onlookers by announcing that the man's sin is forgiven. He does this in response to the faith of the men who have brough their friend (v20). This horrifies the Pharisees who consider it blasphemy because only God has authority to forgive. They don't seem to be saying this out loud but Jesus can read their thoughts (v22).

He asks them if it is easier to heal or forgive but does not give them a chance to answer. He heals the man and declares that this shows that he does have the authority to forgive. This authority rests in his status as "Son of Man." Whilst the Pharisees may murmur and grumble, them man and the crowd respond by praising God (v23-26).

9.6 Read Luke 5:27-32

Jesus meets a tax collector called Levi. This is most likely to be the same disciple known as Matthew and author of the first of the Gospels.⁶² Tax collectors were treated with suspicion because they worked for the occupying power, the Romans and because they were perceived as corrupt and extorting the people. One way in which the Romans would have collected tax revenue is by licensing men like Levi to collect customs via toll like booths along trade routes. This also means that once Levi had paid his dues to the authorities, he could charge as he saw fit. Jesus calls Levi to follow him. The tax-collector responds, leaving his booth and everything behind, his job, his security but also his shameful status (v27-28).

Levi hosts a meal in Jesus honour with other tax-collector friends joining him. Note that like Andrew and Philip, Levi both follows Jesus and seeks to introduce the Lord to others. He is a disciple seeking to make disciples (v29).

Such meals would have been semi-public affairs visible for others to witness and the Pharisees and scribes are there again. They disapprove of Jesus mixing with those labelled as "sinners"(v30). Jesus responds with a saying "it's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick." In other words, Jesus' mission is specifically to help those like Levi and the other tax-collectors who recognise that they need help.

9.7 Opponents

The Pharisees were one of a number of sects and groupings operating within Judaism and Judea and Galilee. Josephus identifies three primary sects:

At this time there were three sects among the Jews, who had different opinions concerning human actions; the one was called the sect of the Pharisees, another the sect of the Sadducees, and the other the sect of the Essenes.⁶³

The Essenes: A sect that was suspicious of and questioned the legitimacy of the High Priest, Sanhedrin and Temple system. They had established their own community and alternative centre of religious devotion at Qumran.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Morris, *Luke* (Repr. 2008. 2nd Ed. TNTC. Nottinghham. IVP, 1988), 137.

⁶² Morris, *Luke*, 159.

⁶³ Josephus, Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities*, XV/10.

⁶⁴ C.f. NT Wright, *The New Testament People and the people of God*, 170.

The Sadducees: This grouping held significant political power within the Sanhedrin which was the ruling council supporting the High Priest in decision making. They only recognised the Torah (Genesis – Deuteronomy) as Scripture and did not believe in a general resurrection of the dead.

There were also groupings of **Zealots** that sought to participate in direct, violent resistance against Roman occupation. Some of Jesus' disciples were former zealots and it is likely that Barrabas and the two men execrated alongside Jesus would also have been resistance fighters or bandits rather than common thieves.

The Pharisees were more of a populist movement whereas the Sadducees were seen as part of the establishment. They relied on a developed tradition of rabbinic teaching interpreting and developing the Law.⁶⁵ Their primary concern was to see spiritual reformation and to encourage the whole people towards devout observation of Torah. This was crucial in relation to what they saw as "the encroachment of non-Jewish ways of life". NT Wright says that

"The Pharisees saw themselves as standing firm for the old ways, the traditions of Israel, against paganism from without and assimilation from within."⁶⁶

Their expectation was that the coming day of the Lord leading to the liberation and vindication of God's people was dependent on such a turning to YHWH. The name may well have been coined by opponents.⁶⁷ Their roots go back to the Maccabean revolt and the Hasmonean dynasty.⁶⁸

The Pharisees are seen in the Gospels as primarily antagonistic towards Jesus and so the name has become a by-word for hypocrisy and legalism. It would be mistaken to see the movement as acting as a kind of "thought police." Their actual power and influence was probably more limited than that. And primarily in Jerusalem.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the rabbinical tradition connected to Pharisaism probably reflected a diversity of thought meaning that it would be unfair to label it a legalistic movement. However, the concern for purity and reform does help to show how members of the grouping may have seen Jesus' willingness to engage and befriend those who did not willingly conform as a threat.

9.8 Friend of sinners

Luke follows Mark by placing together three incidents: the leper's cleansing, the forgiven paralytic and culminating with the calling of Levi.⁷⁰ These events are brought forward ahead of the significant teaching block from the sermon on the Mount whereas, Matthew leaves these events until after the sermon, interspersing them with other accounts of faith, healing and sign miracles.⁷¹

By drawing them tightly together and placing them before the sermon on the mountain material, Luke does two things. First, he reminds us that Jesus is the healer/saviour, first and foremost before he is the teacher-lawgiver.

Secondly, he, along with Mark links healing, cleansing and forgiveness. The punchline is that Jesus has specifically come to save the worst of sinners, those whose deeds and reputations place them as

⁶⁵ Westerholm, "The Pharisees" Pages 110-114 in in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Ed. Green, McKnight & Howard Marshall, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 110.

⁶⁶ NT Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God* (London. SPCK, 1992), 187.

⁶⁷ NT Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God*, 187.

⁶⁸ NT Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God*, 187-188.

⁶⁹ NT Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God*, 186.

⁷⁰ Mark 1:40-2:17.

⁷¹ See Matthew 8-9.

outcasts, beyond the pale. This is crucial because the Torah and Prophets, starting with Adam and Eve's banishment from Eden, continuing with the requirements for individual rule-breakers and culminating with Israel's own banishment from the land links exile with God's judgement and so with death. Jesus identifies with those who are banished, figuratively and literally and so, he is already putting himself in the place of death.

10 Lord of Time and Space

The moment when I decided that Dr Who had lost the plot was when David Tennent's iteration of the character brazenly announced that he was Lord of Time and Space. I think the only correct retort to such a claim is "No you are not. You are just an ordinary alien." Luke in the next few pericopes⁷² will introduce us to the true Time Lord.

10.1 Read Luke 5:33-35

On another occasion, Jesus is challenged over his disciples failure to adhere to the same religious disciplines that other groupings, not only the Pharisees but also John the Baptist's disciples observed. Specifically, they were not participating in ritual fasting (v33).

Jesus' response is to ask whether it is possible to get wedding guests to abstain from eating. The guests are referred to as *huios tou numphonos* – sons of the wedding chamber "", whilst obviously this indicates a close, familial even relationship. These are not the fringe guests at the party to make up numbers but rather close friends and family who are heavily invested in the day (v34), they are those with responsibility for attending to the groom prior to the most intimate moment, today's nearest equivalent would be groomsmen but with a closer corresponding role to the traditional bridesmaid. The wedding party will have plenty of time for fasting when the groom has left the party but it would be rude for them not to join in the celebrations. By implication, Jesus is the bridegroom and so it would be wrong for his disciples to fast whilst he is with them. When he is gone, they will. This might possibly indicate a change of mood to sadness due to his departure or of spiritual urgency and a change of priorities as they commit wholeheartedly to the mission (v35).

10.2 Read Luke 5:36-39

Jesus tells a parable which can be summed up as "old and new materials do not mix." If you have new clothes, then you don't cut pieces off of them to patch up old clothes. That defeats the point of getting the new clothes, the old ones are obviously patched -and not very well whilst the new ones have been damaged and have a big hole in them (v36). Similarly, you don't re-use an old wine skin (a container for wine made from goat or sheepskin) when you make new wine. The old material for the old wine-skin will have dried out and lost its give meaning that the new wine will burst it. You will lose both the wine skin and the new wine (v37-38). Jesus is pointing out that the idea of doing this is absurd, you wouldn't patch old cloth with new or pour new wine into old wine skins, so why might someone be tempted to do so. Well, the problem is that we can become attached and addicted to something old. It's difficult to get people to switch to new wine for example (v39).

These two examples further illustrate the point that Jesus has been making in response to the challenge over his disciples' failure to fast. The expectation placed on Jesus' followers to confirm to existing customs and rituals suggests that those questioning Jesus have not grasped the new and different situation in which they find themselves. Jesus and his message or Gospel are like the new wine and the new clothes. You cannot patch Jesus/The Gospel onto the old clothes of the Law of Moses, you cannot seek to fill the old religious system with the new life of the Gospel. The reason that they cannot recognise the absurdity of what they are trying to do is that they are wedded, addicted even to the old way of life.

⁷² A pericope is a small, discreet section of text. The term is used particularly in reference to the Gospel accounts.

10.3 Variations and how we report or interpret.

There is a slight variation between how Luke reports the parables and how Matthew and Mark do.⁷³ Whilst Luke simply explains that the two types of cloth will not match, the other two Gospels explain how, observing that the new cloth, with more give in it will pull away from the old, creating a further tear. However, Matthew and Mark do not add the point that you have ruined the new cloth as well.

Are the accounts in contradiction, even if only on a minor point. I would suggest not and here is why. First, it is possible that each Gospel has expanded on what they knew Jesus to have said. The specific quotation from Jesus may simply have been “No-one patches old cloth with new.” If this were a known parable, either in wider society or used multiple times by Jesus, then those hearing and reporting will have understood the point made and there would have been equally, non-contradictory ways of expressing the point. So, the Gospel writers may have commented on and enlarged on what they knew Jesus to have said. However, it is also possible that Jesus said more than each individual writer mentions, each then chooses to summarise by selecting a part of what Jesus said. The case remains that the accounts do not contradict but make the same point.

The Gospel accounts clearly compress down what Jesus said. If they reported word for word, then they would have been much longer! This does help us to think about our approach to Bible translation. There are two approaches, one formal seeks to translate word for word whereas, the dynamic equivalence approach seeks to offer a thought for thought rendition. Looking at how the Gospel writers themselves report things I don’t think they would be uncomfortable with the thought for thought approach.

10.4 Read Luke 6:1-5

It’s the Sabbath and Jesus is walking with his disciples, presumably en-route to or from the synagogue. They pass through fields and as they go, his disciples pluck some of the corn and begin to chew on it. There are some Pharisees walking that way too and they see this. They complain that the disciples are breaking the law. They are doing something unlawful or not permitted on the Sabbath. Of course, the ten commandments themselves don’t specify such an activity as out of scope but the scribes had gone to great lengths to define what counted as labour and which activities were permitted. As this wasn’t within the exceptions, it counted to them as a form of labour (v1-2).

Jesus does not get into a dispute with them about their petty interpretation of Torah or even at this stage about their additions to the law. Instead, he cuts to the heart of the matter with an example and then the central rebuttal to their nonsense. First, he reminds them that King David had eaten the consecrated bread reserved for the priests when on the run from Saul. He was permitted to do so, first because he was the Lord’s anointed and secondly because he had urgent need. In effect, that bread was there specifically for the purpose of feeding the Lord’s anointed in his time of need. The argument is along the lines of “If that was okay for him, then how much more is this permitted for me?” Then the central point. It is Jesus who is the Lord of the Sabbath and so, he is the one who gets to decide what is and isn’t permitted on that day (v3-5).

10.5 Read Luke 6:6-11

On another sabbath, Jesus is speaking in the synagogue. There’s a man there whose hand is withered. It’s his right hand so loss of its use would have been a huge handicap. The Pharisees are

⁷³ C.f. Mark 2:21 and Matthew 9:16.

watching to see what Jesus will do. They wanted to see if he would heal someone because if he did, they would be able to accuse him of something unlawful. Jesus knows this and so he calls the man to stand in front of him (v6-8).

Then he poses a question. “What is *exestin?*” Notice that he is taking the word they have used to accuse him, “lawful” or “permitted”. He is again challenging them about the rules but this time it is less about who decides and more about what the purpose or spirit of the law is. Why are Sabbath rules in place? Are they for doing good, bringing life and healing or for seeking to destroy, kill, harm? This puts the ball back in their court because they have been doing the latter. They have been seeking to accuse him in order to destroy him (v9).

He looks around at them, challenging them, inviting a response but there is none. So, he commands the man to stretch out the withered arm, which he does. Jesus has healed him. The Pharisees are furious and go away plotting to kill Jesus, doing exactly what is not permitted and lawful for the Sabbath (v10).

10.5 Jesus and the Sabbath

Luke has a particular interest in Jesus’ use of the Sabbath day. He references the Sabbath 17 times (including reference to the Sabbath that begins as Jesus after Jesus’ crucifixion. This compares to 9 times in Matthew and John, and 10 in Mark.

Confrontation on the Sabbath was significant because this was at the heart of the religious leaders’ understand of God’s Law. First, there was the question of who decided what was and wasn’t permitted. If they, through their interpretation of Torah and legal traditions did not permit something then you couldn’t do it. Jesus is clear that he is the Lord of the Sabbath and so he makes the rules. Secondly, there was their understanding of the purpose of the Law. Matthew will note that exceptions such as care for animals⁷⁴ were allowed on the Sabbath whilst Mark states that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”⁷⁵ Both of these points align with the point that the purpose of the day and the law is to be life-giving, for good not to plot, destroy and kill -for evil.

10.6 Lord of Time

Central to Jesus’ response to his interlocutors is that they do not know what is happening because they do not know who he is. If Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, then he is the Lord of Time. If Jesus is the bridegroom, then he is God himself come to be with his people Israel.

If the bridegroom, the Lord of Space and Time is present, if as we’ve seen earlier in Luke’s Gospel it is the year of Yahweh’s favour, then something new, something epoch changing is happening and they risk missing it. This is perhaps the only time when it would be appropriate to describe people as being on the wrong side of history.

10.7 Us and the Sabbath

Once we have talked about Jesus and the Sabbath, this raises questions about how we are meant to view the Sabbath. It is worth noting that there are disagreements within reformed and evangelical thinking over this. Some people believe that the Sabbath commandment was abolished because we

⁷⁴ Matthew 12:11-12.

⁷⁵ Mark 2:27.

are not meant to observe feast and fast days. However, it would be strange to see 9 out of the ten commandments still in force and one not. Part of the argument is that we look forward to our coming Sabbath rest in the New Creation. I would argue however that its is exactly because we are meant to look forward to that greater rest to come that we mark time for rest now as a foretaste.

Indeed, the Sabbath Day, could be seen both as a foretaste of the greatest Sabbath to come and a model for the rest of our rest, how we take time each day to pause. I am personally convinced that the we see evidence in Scripture of a move from Saturday Sabbath to Sunday as the Lord's Day following the resurrection.

It is helpful to think both about what God does with the Sabbath and what Jesus was doing with it to consider our relationship to it. When God created the world, he took six days and then rested on the seventh. We are not meant to think of him as being tired and needing time off. Rather, God in effect had built his own cosmic temple. Rest for him was the point where he took his throne and received glory from his creation, enjoying and delighting in its goodness. This tells us something about Sabbath rest. It is not just about time off, it is about enjoying the fruit of our labours. It is about taking time to delight and enjoy together. In that sense, creation also gives back to us as God's regents over it. Sabbath reminds us of that and this is why Sabbath was made for man, not vice versa.

It is helpful too, to think about what Jesus has been doing. We've seen how he has recapitulated Israel's history. He has been through exile, he has spent time in the wilderness, he has been baptised, going through the waters of death. By implication, he is meant to recapitulate entry into the land and so into promised rest or Sabbath. Israel's imperfect Sabbath rest meant that they could enjoy living in the land, experiencing God's provision. This also means that when Jesus did good on the Sabbath and when the disciples had a picnic, it wasn't just that these provided permitted exceptions to the Sabbath Law but they fulfilled the purpose of the Sabbath. It was that those good things fulfilled Sabbath by bringing life, health, enjoyment and worship.

That's why we are meant to look forward to the greater Sabbath to come and our mini-sabbaths now should point us forward. So, I think it would be helpful for us to ask two things about our Sundays and our gatherings. First, do they point us forward, do they solidify our hope in the resurrection and the rest to come? Second, do they give us opportunity to delight in God's goodness and to enjoy him.

11 The Big Preach

The Gospels introduce both to what Jesus did and what he said. A significant proportion of that teaching is grouped together in both Matthew and Luke at around about this point either under the heading of “The Sermon on the Mount” when referencing Matthew or “The Sermon on the Plain” (Luke). I believe both accounts to be referring to the same event and see no contradiction in Luke’s addition of a little bit of detail to show Jesus going up a mountain, appointing apostles and then moving to a more level place to teach the crowds but still in the hill country.

It has been suggested too from time to time that because Luke and Matthew do not group all of the same material together (Luke spreads some of the content throughout his Gospel), that the sermons are stylised and that Matthew in particular has drawn together material that wasn’t preached in the one place. However, it is both possible that Luke might move some of the material elsewhere to fit around his ordering of material but also just as likely that Jesus made similar points in various places just as a politician might repeat stump speeches around the country during an election campaign.

The setting on a mountain top, even more so in Luke with the emphasis of Jesus coming down from the mountain to bring God’s Word to the people and in Matthew with the refocusing of the Law on heart rather than mere external actions seems to echo Sinai and presents Jesus as the true and better Moses.

11.1 Read Luke 6:12-16

Before Jesus addresses the larger crowd, he goes up a mountain and spends time praying to his Father (v12). He then calls twelve of his followers or disciples to him and designates them as his apostles (v13). This is a motley, diverse crew that includes fishermen and tax-collectors alongside zealots and no doubt the odd pharisee. The list concludes with Judas, the one who would betray Jesus (v14-16).

11.2 Some apostles

The term apostle seems to have naval origins relating to ships sent out but then was used more widely to refer to an authorised messenger or emissary.⁷⁶ The term seems to have been employed in that sense by Jewish sources. The apostle had full authority to act in the name of the one who had commissioned them.⁷⁷ Here, Luke describes The Twelve as being designated “apostles in a way that distinguishes them from other followers of Jesus. Boch notes that Luke uses the term more frequently than the other Gospel writers.⁷⁸ The specific combination of “naming/designating” and “apostles is only found here and in Mark 3:14.⁷⁹ The word “apostle” is used again in Mark 6:30 whilst Matthew uses it at 10:31. Luke uses the term six times, perhaps in connection with his plan to write a second work on the apostles’ acts.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Bauer and Danker, A Greek-English Lexicon (3rd Edition (BDAG). London. The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 122.

⁷⁷ Nolland, Luke, 266.

⁷⁸ Boch, *Luke*, 541.

⁷⁹ Boch, *Luke*, 541.

⁸⁰ Boch, *Luke*, 541.

It is the apostles who spend significant time with Jesus in Luke and who are first sent out to proclaim the kingdom. These are the ones who eat the last supper with Jesus⁸¹ and it is to them that Jesus sends the women to with the good news.⁸² The term “apostle” is clearly synonymous for Luke with “The Twelve” used by Matthew. It is this same twelve apostles who in Acts are told to wait for the Holy Spirit and who are empowered with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

So, the term as used in the Gospels and particularly in Luke seems to take on a particular meaning to identify the twelve members of Jesus’ inner circle, those who would be eye-witnesses of the resurrection and have a particular responsibility for passing on the good news. The number twelve has symbolic qualities. Jesus tells the twelve that they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel.⁸³ In Matthew 5:1; 10:213 and Luke 6.13, we see Jesus, not just commissioning messengers but in effect appointing the tribal heads of the new kingdom. The symbolism is not lost on the eleven who remain after Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and suicide, so they seek to appoint a replacement. However, it seems that Jesus has another plan and Paul becomes recognised as an apostle “although one born after time”⁸⁴ due to his personal vision of the risen Christ and commissioning with the Gospel to the Gentiles. Jesus’ apostles are hand picked and commissioned by him.

In Ephesians 2:14, Paul explains that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. This is perhaps another way of pointing to Scripture, it is not the personal charisma of these men that provides the foundation we need but rather the specific revelation, the Gospel entrusted to them. For this reason, Paul will insist that if anyone, even he himself were to turn up with a different Gospel then we are to reject it.⁸⁵ Paul will refer to Apostles again in Ephesians 4:11 and we should probably assume that given the close connection in the epistle that he is referring to the same class of people as in 2:14, the twelve and Paul.

However, there are suggestions that we should consider others as having some kind of apostolic role. For example, Junia, is mentioned in Romans 16 as “outstanding among the apostles.” The phrase is so striking that those who considered it impossible or women to hold leadership positions in the church even sought to turn a feminine name masculine.⁸⁶ Others have suggested that Paul simply meant that the apostles held her in high regard, she had an outstanding reputation with them. However, that she was an apostle is perhaps the most natural understanding of Romans 16. Meanwhile James at times seems to be included among the apostles.⁸⁷

Then there are others who clearly have a significant role in the church, wider than responsibility to one local church and therefore more than elders. In fact Timothy and Titus are given responsibility for appointing elders at multiple churches.

In the later 20th century, new church movements including New Frontiers talked in terms of restoring an apostolic ministry and key leaders were recognised as “apostles.” There was perhaps a danger in some quarters that this could have been thought of as restoring the foundations and therefore a new “Twelve.” However, there is, I believe, a recognition that we should distinguish between “Capital A” Apostles and “small a” apostles. Perhaps we might also identify the distinction as being between “Jesus’ apostles”, those designated and commissioned by him to go out with his good news and be

⁸¹ Luke 22:14.

⁸² Luke 24:10.

⁸³ Matthew 19:28.

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:8.

⁸⁵ Galatians 1:6-9.

⁸⁶ Note my position is that elders are male but that leadership is wider than eldership.

⁸⁷ C.f. Galatians 2:9 where it is James, Peter and John who Paul goes to see.

the foundation for the new kingdom, for The Church as a whole geographically and historically versus those who are apostles in the broader sense of the word, commissioned and sent out with a specific relationship to multiple churches in a given time and place.⁸⁸

The distinction matters because what we are specifically looking for from Jesus' Apostles is revelation about the Gospel. When Paul is concerned to defend himself in his letters, especially 1 and 2 Corinthians, it is not because he is concerned for his personal reputation as a leader and I've argued many times that we are not meant to preach 2 Corinthians as a defence for pastors and leaders rather it is the Gospel that he is seeking to defend. We want to be clear then that if and when we choose to use the term "apostle" to refer to contemporary church leaders, that just as with contemporary prophecy, we are not looking to them for new special revelation.

So, in practical terms I would stay clear of those who seem to see themselves as "Capital A" apostles and are self-designated. We cannot appoint ourselves to a role which it is Jesus' prerogative to fill and in any case, given the foundational nature of that role, there seems to be no vacancies. Our responsibility in terms of "apostolic succession" is to pass on the Gospel received from The Apostles.

However, I believe there is a place for recognising a ministry which goes beyond the local church, particularly where the relationship is dynamic and based perhaps on someone being involved in the planting or revitalisation of a church whilst remaining outside of its own leadership structures. Such people with an apostolic type ministry can be helpful in giving support and advice to a local church on a range of issues from vision and mission through to pastoral care. It can also be helpful to consult such outside voices when making decisions about appointing new leaders whether staff team members or voluntary elders and deacons. In such cases, the role should be primarily relational and it should be for local churches to recognise a person's "apostolic" relationship to them rather than for someone to give themselves the title. Indeed, as with the role of elder, we may be cautious about making this a title that we designate someone by for life and generally speaking see it as describing the relationship between a person and churches for a specific time.

11.3 Read Luke 6:17-26

Jesus comes down from higher up the mountain to level ground. There he is joined by a wider group of his disciples than the twelve, this group are those who have intentionally chosen to follow him and a second group, a larger, wider crowd or multitude, those who are coming out of interest or seeking healing. They have come from as far as Jerusalem in the South and Tyre in the north. Jesus heals and casts out demons. The crowd attempt to get as close as possible, hoping that even the merest physical contact with Jesus will result in healing (v17-19).

Jesus begins to teach them. He looks directly at his disciples (presumably the larger crowd of disciples rather than the twelve). This does not mean that he is only speaking for them to hear but it does mean that the words he says only apply to those who become disciples and cannot be claimed by those who are merely curious or seeking benefit through temporary contact. It is an invitation to stay with him rather than just running away once you've got what you want (v20a).

Jesus declares that a series of categories of people are blessed, in other words favoured by God and happy. He starts with those who are poor. Matthew uses a fuller phrase to indicate "poor in spirit" a

⁸⁸ Nolland talks about "apostles of the church" as distinct from the twelve. Nolland, Luke, 266. Stott also distinguishes "apostles of the church" from Apostles of Christ. He seems to use the former term in a very limited sense, those sent out as missionaries or representatives of a local church. However, he does talk in terms of those who seem to have an apostolic type of ministry including episcopal oversight. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (2nd Ed. 1991, Repr.1999. BST. IVP Leicester. 1979), 160-161.

recognition that it is first of all about knowing your spiritual need. Luke curtails it to “poor” and seems to allow for material need as well as spiritual, perhaps recognising that the two go together. They are blessed because God’s kingdom is for them. They are part of God’s people and have the full benefits of citizenship(v20b). The next categories are those who are hungry and those who weep. Their circumstances will be reversed, the hungry will be fed and tears will turn to joy and laughter (v21).

For the final category, he explicitly addresses “you”, the disciples, although given that he has been looking at them all along, it is clear that all of these categories refer to them rather than distinct groups of people. Jesus’ disciples will be poor, go without food, caused to grieve. Similarly, this means that the practical blessings of reversed fortunes arise from their status as citizens of God’s kingdom. So, Jesus now says that they are blessed whenever the face any kind of persecution, opposition, hatred and rejection due to their identification with him. When these things happen, they can rejoice because it is a badge of honour to suffer for the Lord’s name. This is how the ancestors of those persecuting Jesus’ followers had treated God’s prophets in the past (v22-23).

Jesus identifies a contrasting group of people. If the blessings applied to Christ’s disciples as one group who were poor, hungry, mourning, persecuted rather than separate groups, then we can apply the categories of woes to a single group of people, those who reject and oppose Christ’s mission. These are the ones who are well off and well fed, contented, happy and enjoying life including the praise and respect of others. However, the God who brings down the proud and lifts up the humble will reverse their fortunes too. They will find themselves poor, hungry and sad. Their reputation will be destroyed (v24-26).

11.4 The new covenant people of God

The blessings and woes here may be seen as echoing the blessings and curses of the covenant ceremony in Deuteronomy when God’s people entered the land. If Christ’s designation of the twelve amounts to the foundation of the new kingdom with new tribal heads then here by addressing the wider group of disciples, he constitutes that kingdom by including his followers as citizens.

This may also help us to think about what the blessings entail and guard us from prosperity thinking. There are three elements to this I believe. First, Christ is saying that whatever their status in the world, they have a different status and identity in him. The World, in opposition to Christ may see them as poor, sad, nobodies but in Christ they have everything they need and are seated with him as co-heirs. The blessings then are first of all spiritual. It means that we should see each through this lens in the church and so there is a practical, material dynamic to this too. Believers should look after one another as family.

Thirdly, there is an eschatological element to this. There are future blessings to be realised. WE may experience poverty and persecution now but the day is coming when Christ will return, reversing fortunes, turning the world order upside down in order to put things right. We can look forward with hope to the day when all suffering will cease and every tear be wiped away.

11.5 Read Luke 6:27-36

Jesus speaks to those “who are listening”, this echoes a phrase used elsewhere about those “with ears to hear” but also begins to set us up for the conclusion to the sermon that Jesus’ disciples must not only hear his words but do them (v27a). Here he commands his followers to go beyond what the Law requires, not only to love their neighbours but even their enemies (v27b). In other words, they

are not to respond in kind when treated harshly or unfairly, they are to repay evil with good. They should respond to cursing with blessings and pray for those who cause them harm (v28).

Jesus gives two examples, first if someone hits you across your cheek, rather than striking back you should turn and let them have a second go at your other cheek. He then says that if someone asks or demand your outer coat, you should offer them all of your clothes (v29). Jesus' followers are to be open handed and generous, giving when asked and even when wronged such as having something taken without their permission, they are not to seek restitution (v30). The principle to follow is not so much "Do as done to you" as "do as you would prefer to be done to you" (v31).

Matthew adds an additional example, if you are required, presumably by a Roman soldier to, to carry their baggage for them for one mile, you should carry it an additional mile.⁸⁹ Matthew links this to Jesus' subverting the Lex Talon commandment which required "an eye for an eye."⁹⁰ This suggests that the setting for being struck and giving up clothing is the law court.⁹¹ The suggestion being that the disciple is not to contest when accused nor to enforce restitution themselves for a defaulted load.

Jesus insists that they love and do good to their enemies because there is nothing particularly commendable about loving and showing kindness to friends who love and treat you well. Even "sinners", those who belong to the category of living outside of God's law and covenant are capable of reciprocal friendship (v32-33). This means that loaning money and property should not in itself be seen as a charitable act. Again, even the sinners, the ungodly are capable of lending where they are confident that the borrower will repay the loan (v34).

Therefore, followers of Jesus are to be marked out as those who love and do good to those who hate and oppress them, they should show love to their enemies by giving and lending without expecting anything back in return. If they do, although they may forfeit earthly reward, God will reward them. They will show themselves to be "Sons of the Most high", children of God because by being generous, gracious, merciful, they will reflect his image and character(v35-36).

11.6 Read Luke 6:37-42

Jesus followers are not to sit in judgement of each other. They are to avoid condemning their brothers and sisters. This is because we are judged by the same standard by which we judge one another. If we condemn, we will be condemned too because we too are sinners. If we show mercy and compassion we can also expect mercy and compassion (v37). This is restated positively, in a call to active generosity. The believer who gives generously can expect to receive back in the same way. Practically, this will work out in a community of God's people being generous to one another but eschatologically, those who understand grace know that we have already received much from God and will receive more still in the New Creation (v38).

We do not judge each other because we are still followers, still learners, it is for Christ to judge but also because this would set us up as the teachers and so limit the capacity of others to learn. It will be like the blind leading the blind until we have dealt with the very obstacles to our own ability to see clearly (v39-42).

11.7 Overflowing grace

⁸⁹ Matthew 5:41.

⁹⁰ Matthew 5:38-42.

⁹¹ C.f. Nolland, Luke 1 -9:20, 296.

One popular theory that did the rounds for a while was that Jesus wasn't so much advocating a passive response as encouraging a form of non-violent resistance here that would subvert oppression. The argument ran along the lines that to strike someone on the cheek was an insult but to turn the other cheek would force them to use the back of their hand which would be more demeaning to them. Similarly, going on for an extra mile might actually inconvenience the soldier if you took him past his destination and I guess that stripping fully naked would cause a bit of a scene.

However, rather than attempting to second guess meaning into the passage, we do better to look at what Jesus clearly states. The motives are clear in Jesus' words. This has nothing to do with subversive resistance and everything about showing true love loving others as God has loved us in Christ. It means following Christ's own example. He loved his enemies to the point of forgiving them from the Cross.

Given that Paul challenged the behaviour of authorities who ignored his status as a Roman citizen, appealed to Rome and defended himself against false accusation in his letters, we might consider there to be a wisdom element here. Context will affect how we respond and so whilst we should not worry about our own personal circumstances or even reputation. However, there may be situations where it is right to defend our rights and reputation. This may be the case where:

1. Failure to defend yourself may put others such as your family and church at risk.
2. It is better for the other person, especially in regards to their spiritual growth as a disciple or potential disciple that they are challenged.
3. The reputation of the Gospel is linked to the attack on your reputation.

That being said, the underlying principle is that followers of Jesus need to have a deep understanding of grace. This means first that we are aware of what we deserve, that we deserve judgement because of sin. Secondly, we recognise that we get something different, we are aware of God's past, present and future grace to us. This is what will lead to an overflowing mercy, forgiveness and generosity to others.

11.8 Read Luke 6:43-49

Jesus rounds off his sermon with two parables or pictures. In the first, he presents two trees, one produces good fruit, grapes or figs, the other thorns and brambles. You can tell the type of tree, by its fruit (v43-45).

In the second picture, there are two houses, one has solid foundations, the other hastily erected quickly straight onto the sand. We can tell what the foundations are like by how the building responds to storms. Similarly, the evidence of what the foundations of our lives are can be seen by how we face the storms of life. Jesus says that the wise person with solid foundations, and by implication healthy roots in the other image is the one who not only listens to what he says but puts it into practice (v46-49).

11.9 Wisdom and the Gospels

Both Matthew and Luke include the parable of the wise and foolish builder as the closing element of the Sermon. Luke does not use the words "wise" or "foolish" here although it is implicit and in fact only uses the word "wise" twice in the Gospel.⁹² Meanwhile, Matthew uses the word 10 times.⁹³ Luke however also refers to "wisdom" seven times including the statement

⁹² Luke 10:21 & 12:42.

⁹³ There are three further uses of the word in English translations but these are references to the Magi.

“Wisdom is proved right by all her children”⁹⁴

This has a Proverbial feel to it and there is a sense in both Gospels that Jesus is a teacher of wisdom. The wisdom literature in the Old Testament, especially in Proverbs but also in Psalms might be viewed as meditations on God’s Law and so, particularly in Matthew’s retelling of the Sermon on the Mount we can observe New Covenant insights or meditations on The Law as we discover that it is not about outer obedience but inner heart change. In Luke 11:31, Jesus says that the Queen of Sheba will condemn those who reject him because he is the true and better Solomon. ⁹⁵

Jesus offers true wisdom, hidden from the wise but available to those who seek him.⁹⁶ Of course it is hidden because although the people recognised him as wise, Mark 6:2, the leaders and those who should have been wise rejected him.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Luke 7:35. C.f. Matthew 11:19.

⁹⁵ Matthew 12:42.

⁹⁶ Luke 10:21.

⁹⁷ Matthew 23:34.

12 Faith, fear and death

When Jesus comes down from the Mountain, Matthew tells us about the healing of a man with leprosy. Luke includes a similar account earlier, in chapter 5. Then both Matthew and Luke introduce us to a Centurion whose servant is ill. There are differences between the accounts. In Matthew 8:5-13, it is the centurion himself who comes to Jesus and asks for his help. In Luke, the centurion sends two delegations. This need not be a contradiction. As we have discussed earlier when considering “apostles” it is possible for someone to act on behalf of another, in their name, carrying their authority. Luke may be seen as giving the full detail in order to emphasise and empathise with Gentile nervousness about acceptance through the Gospel. Morris observes that this would also be reassuring to those, like us, who have not had the opportunity to meet Jesus in the flesh and may feel that our experience is second hand.⁹⁸ Matthew’s focus on the centurion himself may be seen as helping a more Jewish audience to grasp the radical willingness of Jesus to cross ethnic boundaries.

12.1 Read Luke 7:1-10

Jesus returns to Capernaum from preaching up in the mountains or hill country, he is accompanied by the crowds that have been with him. A delegation of the synagogue elders come to see him. They’ve been sent by a centurion whose servant is ill. Note that the synagogue elders seem to have a good working relationship with both the centurion and Jesus. This suggests that the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders, whether his home-town synagogue or the Pharisees and Sadducees does not yet amount to absolute and universal rejection (v1-3). They “pleaded” with Jesus “earnestly” indicating sincerity both in their concern for the Roman officer and their trust in Jesus to act (v4). They argue that the officer deserves Jesus’ compassion and help because he is a friend of the Jews, “He loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” In other words, he is a God-fearer. He has not converted formally through circumcision but he has come to recognise Yahweh as the true God and whilst a Gentile and part of the occupying power, he seeks the wellbeing of Israel. Note, that this could have been seen as a smaller scale imitation of Herod The Great’s funding of the Temple development project but unlike with Herod, this man is clearly seen as sincere and trusted (v5).

Jesus is near to the centurion’s house when another delegation is sent. This time, they say to Jesus that he does not need to go all the way to the house. The Roman officer understands how authority works, orders should be obeyed immediately. He trusts Jesus’ authority to command the sickness to leave (v6-8).

Jesus declares his amazement at the man’s faith. The delegation return to find that the servant is healed. It is implicit since they have told Jesus that he just needs to say the word that this is in response to his command (v9-10). This does raise a challenging thought. Whilst, the man’s faith in Jesus’ authority is incredible to see and stands out from the lack of faith of Jesus’ compatriots, it does leave us asking whether the man missed out by not having Jesus come to his house. Compare and contrast for example with Levi and Zacheus.

12.2 Read Luke 7:11-17

Jesus goes to a town called Nain and there at the city gate meets a funeral procession. The dead man was an only son and his mother was a widow. So, she had lost everything. She would have

⁹⁸ Morris, Luke, 155.

been dependent on him for support and so in practical as well as emotional terms, life ahead looked bleak (v11-12).

Jesus has compassion for her. Fascinatingly, this is the first time the word is used in Luke and of its three usages, unlike Matthew, it is only on this occasion that Luke applies it directly to Jesus. In the other two, Jesus himself uses it in parables: The Good Samaritan⁹⁹ and The Prodigal Son.¹⁰⁰ He tells her not to weep, just as he comforts Mary and Martha when Lazarus dies (v13).

Jesus touches the bier, and the procession stops. He tells the man to get up and he does, immediately beginning to speak. Movingly, Jesus then returns the son to his mother (v14-15).

Those present are awestruck. They recognise Jesus as “a great prophet”, though not yet as the Son. They do however recognise that God is powerfully present. News of the miracle spreads and so Jesus becomes increasingly famous, not only in Galilee but Judea too (v16-17).

12.3 Read Luke 7:18-35

John the Baptist’s disciples report to him what is happening. At this stage, John has been imprisoned by Herod. He sends a couple of them to check out the reports and they ask Jesus on the Baptist’s behalf whether or not he is the Messiah or they should wait for another one to come (v18-20). What is surprising here is that John had already previously recognised Jesus as the Christ. He had pointed his disciples towards Jesus as “The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World.” Even in the womb, he had leapt for joy at the arrival of the expectant Mary and he had been reluctant to baptise Jesus, arguing that the roles should be reversed. It may be that in the confines of prison, he was experiencing a level of depression and doubt. After all, if Jesus was the one, then wasn’t he meant to have come to set captives free. Why hadn’t Jesus come to rescue John yet?

Jesus’ response is to act before answering, healing many and exorcising demons. He then tells the delegation to return to John and report on what they have witnessed. Notably here, if the sick are healed, the dead raised and good news proclaimed to the poor, then key elements of the Messianic mission are being fulfilled (v21-22). Jesus both encourages and warns John not to stumble but to persist in faith (v23).

Jesus then addresses the crowd and talks about John. He will not allow this apparent wobble to result in them thinking less of John. He asks them what it was that had drawn them to John in the first place, was he like a reed that swayed in the wind. In so doing, he also reminds them of John’s message and points them to the steadfastness he showed them. It is that kind of robust faith that they need and so he is encouraging them not to wobble as well (v24). Were they drawn to a man who lived a comfortable, luxurious life? No, they would have gone to the king’s palace to find someone like that. The point here being both that John was not one for compromise to win favour and ease but also that this was not what they needed either. They were drawn to a prophet and so their great need was to hear God’s voice (v25-26a).

John, however, was more than a prophet. He was the one promised by Isiah who would prepare the way. He was the greatest man to live prior to God’s kingdom coming. Note though that even “the least” in the new covenant people of God’s kingdom is greater than John. John was the last and greatest prophet of the Old Covenant but he lived on that side of history before the Cross. He looked forward to the promise but did not live to see its fulfilment. By emphasising John’s significance and role, Jesus both honours him and gives a definitive answer to the question raised. If John was the

⁹⁹ Luke 10:33.

¹⁰⁰ Luke 15:33.

greatest of the old covenant, its high point and if that was because he heralded the arrival of the Messiah and the coming of the kingdom, then it had arrived. Jesus was the one (v26b-28).

Luke's observation is that John, and Jesus' assessment of him, divides the people who recognised John as a prophet and had been baptised by him from the Pharisees and Scribes who had rejected John. The one group declared God to be righteous, they glorified him and trusted in him. This group that through their repentance proved God's goodness, who vindicated Yahweh included even those considered sinners and outsiders, the tax-collectors. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and Torah experts, although they claimed to know God's purpose through their study of Scripture, by rejecting John, rejected God's purpose and so rejected Yahweh himself (v29-30).

Jesus adds another comment about "this generation" which seems to have the Scribes and Pharisees in mind. He describes children in the market place singing what seems to be a popular ditty. "You won't dance with us to lively music and you won't mourn with us when we lament." The Pharisees are like those challenged in the song. They refused John's call to lament and repent but they also despised Jesus' invitation to the feast. They could not be pleased (v31-34).

Jesus concludes with a statement about wisdom. He argues that "wisdom is justified by her children." The words have the echo of Proverbs about them. They mean that you can tell true wisdom by its consequences. In other words, the Pharisees and Scribes may have been considered wise by many but their failure to accept God's purpose proves them foolish. The tax-collectors may have been despised and considered moral fools but their acceptance of John's message and baptism, their repentance and turning to God showed them to have true wisdom (v35).

12.4 Read Luke 7:36-50

Jesus is a guest at a pharisee's house. Whilst having dinner, reclined on a couch rather than sitting up at a table, an uninvited neighbour comes into the house. She had a bad reputation as a sinner and the assumption is that this indicated a reputation for immorality. She stands behind him. He would be leaning in to the table, so she is at his feet and she is moved to tears. She wipes away the tears with her hair and then does what she has come to do. She breaks open a jar of perfume and anoints him with it (v36-38).

The Pharisee, a man called Simon is disgusted. A sinful women shouldn't be that close to a holy man, contact with her will make Jesus unclean. If Jesus was a prophet then who would know about her life and her past. So, either Jesus does not know and so cannot be a prophet or is a prophet, knows and is wilfully doing something shameful (v39).

Jesus' response is to set him a question via a parable. Who is going to show the most gratitude out of two debtors and Simon answers that it will be the one who has been let off the greater debt. The meaning is obvious. The woman's posture towards Jesus demonstrates such gratitude, a recognition that she has been forgiven. There are two elements to this. First, if she was showing gratitude, then she was forgiven, she no longer was a sinner, no longer unclean. Secondly, what level of attitude should Simon have shown (v40-43)?

The account of Jesus' anointing is told in all four Gospels. The other three accounts place it at Bethany, very close to Jesus' crucifixion and John identifies the woman as Mary.¹⁰¹ Matthew and Mark both identify Simon as a leper. The meal in his home suggests that he was now healed and no

¹⁰¹ John 12:3.

longer unclean. Therefore, he had no right to judge but instead should have been as grateful and showed the same love as the woman.

Jesus contrasts sharply, the woman's love with Simon's lack of love. She has stepped in to offer the very hospitality that he has failed to show. He sees her tears as an indication of genuine repentance and he tells her that she is forgiven. This leaves a question mark over whether Simon, although healed physically will experience spiritual forgiveness (v44-48). The others present are amazed at Jesus' willingness and ability to forgive sin (v49). Jesus blesses and sends the woman out declaring that she has been saved through faith (v50).

12.5 Christ my hope in life and death

These events are brought together by Luke to give us a window in on what faith is and what it looks like. Those who benefit from Jesus' ministry, who receive the kingdom blessings described in the Sermon on the Mount including healing, resurrection, forgiveness are those who have faith. Faith surprises, it is seen in the outsider and despised, a Gentile Roman Centurion, tax collectors, a sinful woman and not in religious leaders, even those who have benefited from Jesus in some way and want to have him close.

Faith is active. As James will say in his letter, faith without works is dead. The woman shows her faith by weeping, wiping Jesus feet and anointing him. Simon's passivity demonstrates a lack of faith. Faith can be challenged and we may at times wrestle with doubts, fears and questions as John did. Ultimately faith is itself, as Paul states in Ephesians 2, a gift. The dead man is unable to exercise faith until Christ raises him to life again. It is by faith that we are forgiven and saved.¹⁰²

¹⁰² C.f. Ephesians 2:8.

13 The Good News of the Kingdom

Matthew and Mark cluster together a series of parables with a strong farming theme to illustrate what God's kingdom is like.¹⁰³ Luke selects one of those parables at this stage, the main and longer one about a sower and seed. He pairs this with one also included by Mark at this stage about a lamp and lampstand.¹⁰⁴ He includes another of the parables about faith and mustard seed later but omits the parable about weeds or tares which is included only by Matthew.¹⁰⁵

In the parable of the weeds, Jesus describes a farmer who sows his field. As with the parable of the Sower, the good crop grows alongside a bad crop of weeds. Unlike with the better known parable, the weeds are introduced deliberately and also they do not prevent the growth of the good crop. However, it is impossible to remove the weeds without harming the wheat crop. The farmer decides to leave both crops to grow together until the Harvest. On that day, all will be gathered in but the weeds will then be destroyed.

The primary point of that parable is that just as both crops will grow together, so too, God's true people must live in the world, alongside those who don't believe. This is in fact a common theme across parables. Whilst this has often been used to argue for the concept of the invisible and visible churches with the visible church including those who don't belong to Jesus and that not being discernible, that is not a point explicitly made. The primary point seems to be that the church is in the world for now and there is something of God's mercy and restraint to the absence of judgement now. However, we cannot presume that judgement isn't coming.¹⁰⁶

13.1 Read Luke 8:1-3

Jesus continues to travel from town to town and village to village, preaching or proclaiming and announcing the good news about God's kingdom. We might literally render it "preaching and gospelling" or "preaching and evangelising" (v1a). Whilst he is accompanied by the twelve apostles (v1b). Luke chooses here to introduce a further group of people who are with Jesus. They had in common that Jesus had healed or rescued them from sickness and demons. Luke names three of them though there were significantly more, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna. Notice that Joanna's husband was part of Herod's household staff, possibly as the steward of his estates or potentially in a political role.¹⁰⁷ The followers of Jesus included those who were connected and had influence (v2-3).

13.2 Jesus and women

This comment by Luke is significant. First, it broadens our perspective about who was around and close to Jesus. Whilst our attention is on The Twelve, there was a wider group of disciples and even the broader circle of those invited to draw closer is more than the Twelve. Secondly, we see that whilst the twelve apostles of Jesus were all men, his companions included both men and women. Later in the Gospels, we see that it is women who are last at the Cross when the men have fled and they are first at the tomb on Resurrection Day too. As well as the women mentioned here, we might also want to add Mary and Martha as well as Jesus' own mother, the other Mary.

¹⁰³ Matthew 13, Mark 4.

¹⁰⁴ C.f. Mark 4:21-25.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 13:9

¹⁰⁶ C.f. Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43 .

¹⁰⁷ C.f. Morris, Luke, 169.

Morris observes that there were no women among Jesus' enemies, such was his character and his reputation among them.¹⁰⁸ He also observes that:

"The rabbis refused to teach women and generally assigned them a very inferior place. But Jesus freely admitted them into fellowship, as on this occasion, and accepted their service."¹⁰⁹

This informs my thinking about leadership in the church. Whilst elders are male, the leadership of the church is not just about elders. Paul will instruct elders, deacons and "the women" in 1 Timothy 3 whilst he will greet a number of co-workers including Phoebe, Priscilla and Junia in Romans 16. It seems that the latter may well have been one of the wider "small a" apostles, distinct from the Twelve.

It is important to see too how Jesus deals with women, whether a weeping forgiving sinner or grieving mother here in Luke. We also have the examples of the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery in John's Gospel.¹¹⁰ Jesus stands out in contrast to our culture today of "toxic masculinity." There is something about him which draws women to him without fear or threat nor concern of anything inappropriate. Here is a model example for a redeemed humanity and the potential for a dividing wall to be brought down.

13.3 Read Luke 8:4-15

Jesus tells a parable about a farmer who sows seed. It falls on different parts of the field (v4-5a). A path goes through the field and some seed falls there where it is quickly devoured by birds having also been trampled underfoot (v5b). Some falls in a rocky or stony area where it is not able to put down roots, so whilst it grows quickly, it doesn't have the water or nourishment resources to withstand the scorching sun and withers (v6). Some is choked and squeezed about by thorns, thistles and weeds (v7). However, there is also good, fertile soil where crops are able to grow and bear fruit. He concludes with an invitation along the lines of "are you listening, are you ready and willing to hear." (v8).

Later, his disciples asked him what the parable meant. Mark's version keeps the questioning broad "they asked him about the parable" whilst Matthew suggests that their questions were not just about the specific meaning of this parable but about Jesus' purpose and intent in telling parables. It seems that rather than making things clear, to the disciples, the parables seemed to obscure meaning (v9). The shock factor is that Jesus responds that this is intentional. He is disclosing Heaven's mysteries to them. However, the consequence of the parables is a fulfilment of Isaiah 6:9-11. Although they are able to see him and hear him, they are not able to grasp or understand his mission, identity or message (v10).

This links directly to the parable. The people who "see but do not see, hear but do not understand" are like the hard, rocky and thorny soil. Although they hear the word, like the seed falling into the ground, it does not properly take root and grow. So, Satan is able to get them to forget God's Word, to nullify its effect by taking it from their hearts, in other words preventing them from loving and obeying it (v12). Alternatively, they are distracted by life's cares, ambitions and worries. These things again stop them from acting on God's Word and being fruitful (v13-14). However, there are those,

¹⁰⁸ Morris, Luke, 169.

¹⁰⁹ Morris, 169.

¹¹⁰ Whilst the evidence strongly suggests that the account concerning the woman caught in adultery does not belong at that point in John, I believe that it also points to this being an authentic eye witness account.

like the good soil whose hearts are receptive to hear, understand and do what Jesus says. Their lives will be fruitful (v15).

13.4 Hearing without understanding

There is a stark contrast between how parables are popularly understood and what Jesus actually says. You may have heard them described as “earthly stories with heavenly meanings.” Well that’s true to some extent, although not all parables seem to be stories and I’m not sure how far that gets us as a working definition in understanding their purpose. Usually, the assumption is that they were used by Jesus to make complicated truths easy to understand and more concrete. Jesus here though says that they do the opposite. The obscure, they hide, the prevent understanding.

Why would Jesus do this? It seems counter intuitive to our understanding of the Gospel and God’s love. There are perhaps three aspects to helping us get what is going on. First, Jesus quotes Isaiah 6. That prophecy picks up a theme found elsewhere, in fact, it is idols that have eyes, ears and mouths but are blind, deaf and dumb. As Beale has argued, we become like our idols. God’s people were like those mute, unhearing, unseeing idols and this would be confirmed by their response to Isaiah’s prophecy.¹¹¹ So, too Jesus’ coming and their rejection of him would serve to expose their idolatry. John the Baptist was right to identify Jesus’ coming as judgment and a winnowing. The final fate of wickedness may not have come upon those who oppose God but they were condemned by Jesus’ mission.

Secondly, it is important to notice from Isaiah’s prophecy, that as you read on, it becomes clear that the restrictions are timebound, They will be in place until complete judgement and destruction is served on the land of Israel. I would argue that this is fulfilled spiritually in Jesus, so that his death and resurrection would lead to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the opening of blind eyes.

Thirdly, notice Jesus; invitation at the end of the parable “do you have ears to hear.” The parables serve as a filter. Those who are not his, who are not genuine seekers will go away, entertained by the stories and blessed a little by the miracles. However, genuine seekers will push in to understand. They won’t be satisfied with the stories and will seek out Jesus to gain understanding.

So Jesus increases his use of parables at the very point when his preaching ministry is becoming popular and this will become a decision point. Many of the crowds who throng to him will not stay the course and all but a few will eventually desert him.¹¹²

To understand what a parable means and what it is doing, we need to understand a bit more of how parables work. Traditional approaches have relied on allegory where every single detail of the story is mined for meaning. So, for example, in the parables of the lost sheep, coin and son, there may be a temptation to identify the different protagonists with members of the Trinity, the Son as good shepherd, the Spirit as the woman and the Father as, well, the father of the prodigal. Similar attempts have been made with Matthew 13 to identify the birds, the tree and so on.

Snodgrass dismisses allegory as not interpretation at all. He argues that “people read into the parables elements of the church’s theology that had nothing to do with Jesus’ intention.”¹¹³ In other

¹¹¹ See particularly, GK Beale, *We become what we worship* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2008), 36-70. Also, Beale deals specifically with this passage at Beale, *We become what we worship*, 163-165.

¹¹² C.f. Morris, Luke, 170.

¹¹³ Snodgrass, “Parables”, Pages 591-601 in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Ed. Green, McKnight & Howard Marshall, Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1992) 591.

words there is a danger of “eisegesis” here, that we read our preferred meanings into the text rather than looking to see what it says and means.

It is first best to interpret parables as Scripture does. Here in Luke 8, we are explicitly told by Jesus how to interpret the parable of the Sower. We may also note that when telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks his interlocuter “who is the neighbour” and then when the man begrudgingly acknowledges that it is the Samaritan instructs him to “go and do the same.” However, there will also be clues given within the context of a parable.

Secondly, it is worth remembering that these parables form an example of Jewish rhetoric and pedagogy,¹¹⁴ therefore we should follow the same rules for understanding them as other examples of Jewish teaching, especially proverbial or wisdom literature. What we often see in Scripture, is that a story has a punchline and this is the intended take home. For example, when Nathan tells David a parable about a man who steals a sheep, the punchline to David is “You are the man.” The punchline to the story of the Sower is “Some fell on good soil.” Our desire should be to be like that soil.

13.5 Read Luke 8:16-18

In another parable, Jesus states that if you light a lamp, an oil lamp lit for the night being in mind, then you don’t immediately cover it over or hide it out of sight. Rather you set it where it will give light to those coming in and out of the room (v16). Matthew includes a version of this parable in The Sermon on the Mount.¹¹⁵ In that version the focus is on our responsibility to “let your light shine”, so that our lives are a public witness. It is possible to see an aspect of that in Luke and in Mark 4:21-25, however, the focus here seems to be more on the inevitability of things being revealed and made public. The truth about our hearts will become clear both through the fruit we show in this life now and by the public account we will give on judgement day. Additionally, we might note that whilst the truth is known only to some at the moment, a time will come when Christ’s message will be revealed to all (v17).¹¹⁶

The consequences are the same no matter how you read the parable. We are meant to live fruitful lives that show evidence of the change Christ has made. So, those who hear Christ’s word should consider carefully their response because they are going to be assessed and judged. Jesus warns that those who show evidence of his work in their lives can expect more but those lacking fruit can expect that even what they do have will lose it. This may be a warning that even their physical/material life and possessions will one day go or it may simply be a proverbial/hyperbolic way of saying that if you start with nothing, then you will finish with nothing (v18).

13.6 Read Luke 8:19-21

Jesus’ mother, Mary turns up along with his brothers. This will have included James and Jude and is strong evidence, along with reference to his brothers in John 7 that contra Roman Catholic teaching, Mary was not a perpetual virgin. We know from Mark 3:21-35 that this was no friendly visit. The family had turned up to take charge of him believing that he had gone mad. It might be surprising to think that Mary would go along with this but it is possible either that she had a wobble in her faith or that if Joseph had since died, then she had little say or control now (v19). Like the men with the

¹¹⁴ Snodgrass, “Parables”, 593.

¹¹⁵ Matthew 5:14-16.

¹¹⁶ Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 300.

paralysed friend, they are unable to get into the house due to the crowd with Jesus, so they send a message to him (v20).

Jesus however, seems dismissive “Who are my mother and brothers?” Of course, he would show great care for his mum from the Cross and that James and Jude not only followed him but became leaders in the church suggest that he was on good terms with his family longer term. However, here, he sees a teaching point. We can get lost in the question “who are my...” and miss his response. It’s those who “hear and do” what God says. Jesus reinforces the point made in his parables, that to be included within God’s family, to be part of his people requires living, obedient faith not just lip service (v21).

14 Big Signs

The three synoptic gospels follow up closely Jesus' kingdom parables by pairing two significant signs, or miraculous events together, the calming of a storm and the casting out of demons. Luke will include a further significant sign, the raising of Jairus' daughter.

14.1 Read Luke 8:22-25

One day, Jesus and his disciples cross Galilee by boat. Jesus settles down in the boat and falls asleep. As he falls asleep, a fierce wind comes down upon them. Notice the paired images, Jesus going down in the boat to sleep, the storm coming down on the boat. The storm threatens to swamp and sink the boat (v23-23). The disciples wake Jesus. Notice too, how the story echoes that of Jonah, also wakened from sleep in a storm threatened boat (v24). This difference of course is that the sailors were in greater danger with Jonah on the boat, the disciples with Jesus off the boat. Jesus stands up and speaks to the storm, rebuking it. There is calm. He then rebukes the disciples too for their lack of belief (v25).

14.2 Read Luke 8:26-39

They get off the boat on the opposite shore to Capernaum in the Gerasene or Gadarene region (v26).¹¹⁷ They meet a man who is demonised. He is naked and living among the tombs instead of in the city. This is the affect the demons have had on him (v27). Matthew informs us that there was a second demon-possessed man there.¹¹⁸

Jesus commands the demons to leave and the man screams, falls down and begins shouting at Jesus, begging him to leave him alone and not torture him. It is in fact, the demons who are speaking. At this stage we are only made aware of one of them. We are also told that the demon gives him destructive strength and attempts to restrain him have all failed (v28-29).

It transpires that there the man is possessed by multiple demons. He responds to Jesus' queries by giving his name as "Legion" (v31). They plead not to be sent to their final fate and instead possess a herd of pigs driving them to their destruction in the sea (v32-33). Why does Jesus agree to their request? This is not something that happens with other demons? I suspect that his intention is to both forcibly demonstrate the destructive influence of demons and to push the people of the town to choose between him and the evil one.

When the people of the city find the man in his right mind but also hear about the pigs, they beg Jesus and his disciples to leave. They are too afraid of Jesus (v34-37). The man wants to go with Jesus. In fact, he begs to stay with Jesus, just as through him, the demons had begged Jesus to go. However, Jesus insists that he remains there in the town as a witness (v39).

14.3 Read Luke 8:40-56

¹¹⁷ There are textual challenges here with Matthew and Luke opting for different place names. It is possible that the text was corrupted in copying for one or the other, although exactly how is unclear. Bock suggests that one Gospel opts for a place name known locally whereas the other opts for the larger, better known name in the region. He compares it to choosing to refer to a small place such as Denton in Texas or the better known Dallas-Fort Worth. I may similarly recall how older people from Black Country towns such as Smethwick, Bearwood, Blackheath etc would dogmatically refer to their local town name whereas younger people would happily describe themselves as from the better known Birmingham. See Block, *Luke 1-9:50*, 782-3.

¹¹⁸ Matthew 8:28-34.

Jesus returns from casting out the demons and is met by a crowd, expecting him. One of the synagogue elders' daughter is very sick (v40-43a). Jesus goes with him to heal her but en-route they are interrupted. A woman who has been suffering some form of blood haemorrhage for many years, which would have left her ceremonially unclean reaches out to touch his cloak and is healed. Jesus knows that he has been touched and has healed someone. He stops to find out who. His disciples are incredulous. It would be impossible to single out someone when the crowd were pressing in so close. However, Jesus insists. The woman steps forward and Jesus commends her. She has been healed through her faith (v43b-48).

The time lost is critical. Messengers come. The girl is already dead. It's too late and pointless bothering Jesus. However, Jesus continues with Jairus. He encourages him to continue having faith (v49-50). Jesus arrives at the house. His insistence that the girl is only sleeping is mocked but he goes in to the room with just a small group of his disciples, instructing those mourning to stop with their wailing (v51-53). Jesus then takes the girl by the hand and commands her to get up. She does. Her family are astonished (v54-56).

14.4 Authority

By bringing these three signs together, Luke demonstrates that Jesus has authority over the things that matter in life. He has authority over the physical creation, over the spiritual world, including evil forces and over life and death itself (including sickness). At one level, we might see these miracles as pointing to Christ's divinity and this is the route which many sermons, especially apologetic or evangelistic ones go.

However, Tom Wright, correctly observes that Jesus' ability to work signs and wonders was not unique but follows the pattern of Moses, Elijah and Elisha.¹¹⁹ We might also note that in chapter 9, Luke will tell us that Jesus gives the 12 similar authority. Remember that in Luke chapter 3, we saw that Jesus as Adam's descendant is "Son of God." Luke was concerned as much as anything to present Jesus' humanity, that he is the second, the true and better Adam. So, we may observe that these miracles point us to Jesus as king, as Adam and David's heir, so that it is as the true and better humanity that he exercises authority over creation. In Christ, we are raised up to that intended, exalted position in creation "a little lower than God".

This is not to deny Jesus' divinity. I think that Wright overstates the case against this.¹²⁰ Whilst it is true that the other men mentioned were able to do signs and wonders, things step up a gear, at least in intensity if not spectacularity. Whilst Jesus does not need or rely on miracles to prove his divinity, he simply claims it and uses it, so that he is able to pass on that authority to others and so that his authority goes further as he uses it to determine what is done when and specifically to forgive sin. It is this combination of ability to heal with ability to forgive and the way that he carries his authority as unquestionably and permanently his that point to his divinity. Or more properly we might say that we are not meant to prove his divine nature in isolation, he is fully God and fully man.

¹¹⁹ Wright, *How God became King*, 56.

¹²⁰ Wright, *How God became King*, 53-57.

15 Messiah

Christ is not a proper name or even a surname, despite the impression that is sometimes given by talk of Jesus Christ. We might do better to talk about Jesus The Christ as with John The Baptist. The Christ is an anglicised form of the Greek for “anointed one” or “The Messiah.” This referred to the way in which the Israelite kings had been appointed by having oil poured over them. We might say that every king from Saul, through David, Solomon and onwards were “christs” or “Messiahs.” However, it became clear that the prophets were looking forward to a specific descendant of David as “The Messiah”, one anointed by God in a particularly unique way as David’s eternal heir.

15.1 Read Luke 9:1-6

Jesus sent out the twelve men from his inner circle, they were commissioned and delegated with authority to act on his behalf. We might conclude that this is the basis on which they are designated “apostles” (v1a). The specific authority they are given is to announce the kingdom of God and this is to be accompanied by miraculous signs in the same way that Jesus’ preaching was (v1b-2).

Jesus instructs the apostles to travel light. They are not to be like the travelling cynics and other teachers, rabbis and philosophers. For example, there was to be no bag for money in order to take payments or to provide for their needs. They were to trust others to provide for them, this was an act of trust in God himself to provide through others (v3).

If welcomed, they were to stay in one place, accepting the hospitality there. They were not to move around looking for a better deal. If rejected, they were to leave swiftly. Shaking the dust off their feet was a symbolic indication that they wanted nothing to cling to them from there. They wanted nothing to do with those people (v4-5).

15.2 Read Luke 9:7-9

Herod the Tetrarch hears about all that is happening. This will include Jesus’ miraculous signs, teaching and commissioning of the twelve. This is all happening under his watch in Galilee and creating quite a commotion. Herod Antipas was Herod The Great’s Son and as a tetrarch was given rule by Ceasar over one quarter of his father’s territory (v7a).¹²¹ This piques his interest, especially given the rumours going round about Jesus being a famous prophet, from the past, whether Elijah returning as promised at the end of Malachi, the recently executed John the Baptist, resurrected back to life, or someone else (v7b-8)

Herod is clear in his mind that it isn’t John, he may have been more alert to the fact that the men’s missions overlapped but also there is the sense that both men are different in some way. The most obvious way being that John had not engaged in signs and wonders and had made it clear that he was the forerunner for someone great whereas Jesus was acting with authority by sending the twelve out. However, exactly who Jesus is remains the unanswered question for Herod which he seeks to find answers to (v9).

15.3 Read Luke 9:10-17

¹²¹ The kingdom was divided between Herod The Great’s three sons, Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas and Philip, and his sister Salome.

The twelve return and report back to Jesus. He takes them to Bethsaida. The aim seems to be to withdraw alone but the crowd find him and keep following. He continues to teach them about God's kingdom and heals the sick (v10-11). When evening comes, the disciples want to disperse the crowds so they can find food (v12).

Jesus instead encourages the apostles to provide food. Remember that they have been authorised by him to do miracles and preach on his behalf. They respond by insisting that this isn't possible. All they can muster between them is a small lunch of fish and bread. We know from John's account that it was specifically Andrew who responded and the lunch belonged to one boy. (v13)¹²²

However, Jesus gets the disciples to have the people sit down. He takes the bread and fishes, blesses them and distributes them through the twelve, allowing them to take a role in the miracle even though they doubted (v14-16). Everyone has enough to eat and there are even leftovers. The twelve baskets point to there being abundant supply for each of the twelve when they trust but also reflects God's overflowing provision for the twelve tribes of Israel (v17).

15.4 Read Luke 9:18-20

On another occasion, Jesus asks his disciples who the people think he is (v18). Their answers reflect the rumours that Herod had overheard. Was Jesus a prophetic figure from the past, maybe even Elijah, or was this someone more recent such as John retuning (v19)? Jesus turns the attention on them. "Who do you say I am?" Peter acts as their spokesman and identifies Jesus as Messiah. Matthew will observe that Jesus recognises this as revealed by God to Simon and also links it to Simon's identification as Peter. Jesus declares "On this rock I will build my church." This is the basis for Roman Catholic identification of Peter as the founding father of the church and first pope. However, it is more likely that Jesus is referring to Peter's testimony as the foundation or rock (v20).¹²³

15.5 Who is Jesus?

In the 19th and 20th century the perception grew and became common place that we could say very little for certain about Jesus, the historical person. This perception was particularly shaped by the belief that the Gospels were written much later than the lifetime of Jesus and his earliest followers, that the earliest written sources were primarily collections of sayings and that reports of events were transmitted through oral tradition and therefore subject to embellishment and error in the retelling. If so, then the Gospels were not therefore particularly trustworthy as sources. Rather, they are more likely to offer answers to the specific questions and issues that were contemporary for the church at the time the Gospels were believed to have been written down in their final form.

At the same time, it was generally accepted that Jesus was a historical figure and that his impact through time and history was significant. There was therefore a substantial interest, including at an academic level in the quest to get behind the text of the Gospels and discover the true historical Jesus. Indeed, such a quest was exactly that, to attempt to find hidden clues in Scripture that enabled people to build a picture of the true Jesus rather than reliance on extra biblical historical sources. Albert Schweitzer mapped out the attempts to do this and suggested that we might identify three distinct quests.¹²⁴

¹²² John 6:8=9/

¹²³ Matthew 16:18.

¹²⁴ See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the historical Jesus* (Repr. 1998, Baltimore, Maryland. The John Hopkins University Press).

We might suggest that these quests were attempts to answer the question that Jesus posed to his disciples “Who do you say I am?” If the disciples suggested the possibilities that Jesus was a prophet, named or unnamed, then the modern quest has proposed a variety of answers. These tend to vary between an emphasis on Jesus as kind of sage/near eastern guru figure with a focus on ethical teaching and Jesus as an eschatological prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets seeking to usher in the age of God’s kingdom not just with words but also actions.

The latter option perhaps gets us closer to a sense of who Jesus was and certainly demonstrates a greater continuity with the Jewish scriptures. Jesus, the wise sage seems rather remote from 2nd Temple Palestinian Judaism. Wouldn’t we do better to start with the question “What do the Gospels themselves actually say about his identity?” Even if the Gospels were later and subject to inaccuracies, the texts themselves surely give us a more reliable clue than our own speculative forays.

However, we have more reason to be confident in their reliability given that they were likely to have been written much earlier than scholars in the late/19th/early 20th century assumed and given that we have no reason to prioritise “sayings sources” over those recording the deeds and actions of Jesus. In fact, the primary driver for questioning the reliability of the gospels seems to be a rejection of the possibility of God’s supernatural intervention. We don’t believe in miracles and so we don’t believe what the Gospels tell us about miracles which is all a rather circular argument.

If we come back to what the Gospels, we are given the answer that Jesus is “The Messiah/Christ, the son of the living God.” This makes him much more than a prophet or sage. Our focus then should be on understanding what that means. It also protects us from the temptation to impose our own priorities and hobby horses onto Christ.

15.6 Read Luke 9:21-27

Luke moves quickly to Jesus’ sobering response. The disciples are to keep his identity secret for the time being because other things will happen first. Jesus will be rejected by his own people, betrayed by the leaders, suffer, die but ultimately rise from the dead (v21-22). Mark tells us that Peter latches onto the “suffer and die” bit and now rebukes the very person he had announced as Davidic king. Peter goes from hero to zero and Jesus rebukes him with strong words “Get behind me Satan”. Peter’s words are not godly but rather this is the Devil seeking an opportunity through Peter.¹²⁵

The big question for the disciples is whether they are willing to follow him through death. Jesus’ route to the Messianic kingdom was via the Cross. Here he indicates how he will die. The call to “take up your cross” is not about minor grievances and suffering but rather about a willingness to die to self too (v23). The paradox is that those who seek self-preservation will lose their life and fail in their ambitions anyway. However, if Jesus’ route to glory is through the Cross, then a willingness to give up your ambitions, even your life itself is the only way to save yourself (v24). Furthermore, seeking earthly power is pointless. You can gain everything but if your own eternal security is non-existent, then you will lose everything (v25). The choice then is to follow and honour Christ or to forsake him, not merely out of fear but out of shame and embarrassment, not wanting to be associated with one who seems to have lost and who will die a cruel, humiliating death. Jesus however warns that he will be ashamed of and disown those who are ashamed of him now whilst those who stick with him in his humiliation can look forward to a share in his glory (v26).

¹²⁵ Mark 8:32-33. See also Matthew 16:22-23.

Then he indicates that they don't have long to wait. Some of those listening to him will get to see the kingdom arrive in power and glory before they die. This has confused those who treat it as a reference to the second coming. That would suggest an error on Jesus' part. However, if the coming of the kingdom is about the defeat of the enemy, Satan and the fulfilment of Gospel promises in Jesus at Calvary, then they would get to see that day (v27).

15.7 What kind of king, what kind of kingdom?

The three synoptic Gospels set up the question of Jesus' identity alongside the feeding of the five thousand in relation to the existing king, Herod Antipas. The contrast is made explicit in Matthew 14 and Mark 6 where the Gospel writers go into a bit more detail, describing the nature of John's fate. He had been arrested by Herod and imprisoned for speaking up against Herod's adultery. Herod however remained curious about John. Herod's new bride has a daughter who dances for the king at a feast. Herod offers her anything she wants and on her mother's instruction asks for John's head on a plate.¹²⁶

Herod of course, like his father owed his kingdom to Rome. He was an appointed king. Luke chooses not to even refer to him as king but as Tetrarch here. Jesus is presented in the Gospels as the one born to be rightful king, he is David's heir and the title "The Son of God" also identifies him as God's chosen or anointed one (Messiah). He is the one who rules not just with power but legitimate authority. Herod is a false king then and his feast becomes a place for selfish indulgence at cost to others. The king's banquet brings death. Jesus on the other hand offers a feast out of nothing, providing abundantly for others, he is the king whose banquet offers life.

The question about Jesus' identity is therefore not just about him being the king but what kind of king he is, not just that he is The Messiah but what that means for people. The question "what kind of king" is intrinsically tied up with the question "what kind of kingdom?"

In 2 Samuel 7:1-2, David declares his intention to build a house or temple for YHWH. God responds, insisting that David is not going to do this. Instead, it will be David's descendant who will build the house. God will establish that descendant's reign as eternal over God's people. In other words, David does not need to build God a house, God will build or establish David's house or dynasty. Focus tends to be on Solomon's literal and almost immediate fulfilment of the promise that an heir will build the Temple but his death is followed by civil war and later his descendants will be killed off and the people exiled. It doesn't seem that his fulfilment fits the expectations of the prophecy. The people were looking for a greater fulfilment, expecting an anointed heir who would bring back the glory days and re-establish the kingdom.

We should not see this as purely a political expectation. It is clear from the words and behaviour of agitators such as the Pharisees that the Messianic reign was expected, yes to remove hostile occupation but also to either bring about or result in spiritual renewal. The presence of God's chosen king would symbolise the presence of God with his people, much as the Temple was meant to.

The Gospel writers all identify Jesus with this kingdom expectation. Luke will refer to "the kingdom of God" 31 times and Mark 14. Whilst the phrase is used only 5 times in Matthew, the synonymous term, Kingdom of Heaven is used 31 times there, and uniquely to the Gospels in Matthew's account.¹²⁷ The kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God are one and the same thing. We are not

¹²⁶ Mark 6:21-29; Matthew 14:3-12.

¹²⁷ Caraggounis, "Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven" Pages 417-430 in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Ed. Green, McKnight & Howard Marshall, Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1992), 417.

intended to think of the kingdom of Heaven in terms of a place but rather, the word “heaven is being used” as a stand in for “God” or “Yahweh”, noting Jewish sensibilities about the public use of God’s name. It is possible that Jesus talked euphemistically in terms of “Heaven’s kingdom” but that Mark and Luke altered this to “God’s kingdom” in order to clarify the term’s meaning for Gentile readers.

Jesus will proclaim that the kingdom has drawn near and will teach frequently about what it is like through parables. If it has drawn near because Jesus is the king, then the kingdom is not so much a geographical place as it is everywhere and everyone that is under his control and lordship. That being so, debates popular in the 20th century about whether the kingdom had arrived or merely drawn near in Jesus’ day and whether it is here and inaugurated now or merely still near and coming are a bit of a red herring. For the kingdom to draw near was for the king to arrive and the kingdom is present and active wherever and whenever Christ is Lord and obeyed as such.

16 Revealing

The question of Jesus' identity has now been established and answers offered. Peter's answer that Jesus is "The Messiah" has been recognised as the correct verdict but what exactly does this mean? Peter's own understanding of Messiahship has proven faulty and Jesus has made it clear that his identity as King is wrapped up in a mission that will take him through suffering and death.

This marks the turning point in the Gospels. Each of the synoptics will now focus on Jesus' journey to the Cross. The Gospel writers therefore, devote more material to that final journey to Jerusalem. The ascent begins at about the halfway point in each of the synoptics.

16.1 Read Luke 9:28-36

Clear chronology is provided, this is 8 days after the discussion about Jesus' identity and his coming death. Jesus takes a small inner circle of his disciples, Peter, John and James with him to pray alone up a mountain. This reflects his custom of retreating alone but he now invites others to join him and witness his prayer life (v28).

The three disciples become drowsy and begin to drop off. This seems to offer a foreshadowing of Gethsemane. Two things happen. First, Jesus' appearance is transformed so that he is radiant and glorified. Secondly, he is joined by two other men from Israel's history, Moses and Elijah. They too are in a glorified state. They are discussing what is going to happen to Jesus in Jerusalem (v29-32a).

The disciples wake up and see what is happening. Peter wants to build booths or shelters for the three glorified men (v32b-33). This perhaps suggests a desire to capture and retain the experience for as long as possible but a cloud descends and Jesus is left alone, the others have gone. A voice from heaven speaks, it is the Father. He tells them that Jesus is his beloved son and commands them to listen to him (v34-36).

There is both encouragement and rebuke for Peter here. He is allowed to experience the event despite his previous faux-pas and rebuke. However, there is a further implicit rebuke both for his arguing with Jesus and his hasty speaking here. This time it is God the Father speaking. Implied is a command to be quiet, stop talking and instead listen to Jesus.

Moses and Elijah are key characters from Israel's history and Scripture. However, they are not equal with Jesus and they are unable to fulfil or even accompany Jesus on his mission. Jesus will not be detained by Peter's desire to prolong the experience. The focus therefore rests fully and solely on him

16.2 Read Luke 9:37-42

Coming back down the mountain, Jesus is approached by a desperate man. He has asked the other disciples to help him because his only son is demonised causing convulsions. The disciples have been unable to help. The man begs Jesus to help, to come and look at his son (v37-40).

Jesus' response is to utter a rebuke, an expression of frustration even. ""You unbelieving and perverse generation." It is not stated who this is aimed at, it doesn't seem to be the man who has shown faith by coming to Jesus, perhaps then the disciples but these kinds of strong words are usually reserved for his hypocritical opponents. The word translated "generation" may refer to a specific age category, the people alive at a give time or possibly, the specific people group. The Gospels seem to look at the nation of Israel as a "generation" and it is

they who are characterised by unbelief. We might deduce then that the disciple's failure was symptomatic and representative of the whole people's historical and ongoing unbelief.¹²⁸ Nolland sees echoes of Moses' complaint about having to bear the burden of stubborn Israel in the wilderness (v41).¹²⁹

Even at the point when Jesus arrives, the demon is causing the boy to fit. Jesus command the demon to leave and the boy is set free (v42). Matthew tells us that when the disciples ask why they were unable to heal, Jesus says that it is to do with their lack of unbelief and that this kind are removed only through prayer, with some manuscripts adding "and fasting." It is perhaps less that there is a special kind of demon requiring more earnest prayer and fasting. Note Jesus is disinterested in quantifying necessary faith, it can be as small as a mustard seed. Rather, it is that "this kind" i.e. all demons require prayer because prayer, with or without fasting demonstrates faith and dependence on God. The mistake the disciples made was thinking, following their sending out previously that they were the ones with the authority and ability to cast out demons.¹³⁰

16.3 The beloved son

Just as at his baptism, the Father identifies Jesus as his unique, beloved son. This is significantly important. We can skirt over detail about the exorcism but when the man describes his son as his only son and when Jesus gives him back to his parent, this strongly echoes the situation when Jesus raises the widow's son at Nairn. In Egypt, God had provided a substitute for first born sons. Here, the only Son steps to rescue, heal and restore only sons, a pointer to his coming substitutionary death.

16.4 Read Luke 9:43-55

Even whilst the crowd are marvelling at the miracle, Jesus is once again seeking to focus his disciples minds on what is to come. He repeats his message that his to be handed over to die. Notice here "into the hands of men", in other words to human judgement instead of divine judgement. The Sanhedrin would of course pass Jesus from their court to Pilate's Gentile hearing. The disciples still don't get what Jesus is saying. Note the Isaiah 6 connection again, they hear but don't understand (v43-45).

Their failure to grasp Jesus' message and mission is demonstrated by three further power struggles. First, they argue among themselves about greatness and status. Jesus' response is to use a child as an example. They are to welcome little children because that is how they welcome Jesus. In other words, Jesus has chosen humility (childlike here is neither about childishness or innocence but rather societal status, children were invisible and inaudible to public discourse). The kingdom of God is for the humble, or for the least (v46-48).

¹²⁸ Wilcock argues that Jesus is rebuking the disciples specifically given the context. They should have had stronger faith given what they have already seen. Matthew Wilcock, *The Message of Luke* (BST. Leicester: IVP, 1979, 111. Bock points out that Mark has Jesus answering a question from the wider crowd and so argues that the rebuke is addressed wider than the disciples but clearly includes them for the reasons given by Wilcock. Bock, *Luke*, 883. Nolland agrees. John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (WBC. 35b. Nashville, TN.: Word, 1993), 509.

¹²⁹ C.f. Numbers 11:12. Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 510.

¹³⁰ Matthew 17:19-20.

Secondly, they see someone casting out demons who is not part of their group. They want to stop him but Jesus is not interested in policing and controlling others. His actions are not a threat to them and so they are not to worry about controlling others (v49-50). Thirdly when passing through Samaria, they are opposed. This was unsurprising given the ethnic rivalries. James and John want to do an Elijah and call on fire from heaven to destroy them but this is not what Christ's kingdom is about and he rebukes them (v49-56).

16.5 Read Luke 9:57-62

Whilst Jesus faces opposition, there are others seeking to follow him. However, it seems that they haven't all grasped what is involved. Luke gives three examples here. One man wants to follow Jesus but is warned that this means losing house and home. Discipleship is costly and means rejection (v57-58). Another man is called to follow but seeks permission to bury his parents first, we are not told if they are still alive! He is warned that time is pressing, there's no time to wait (v59-60). A third person wants to say goodbye at home. Jesus tells him that he cannot be looking back if he is going to be a disciple. There's no place for sentimentality (v61-62).

16.6 We are to listen to the one revealed as the Son

This section is illuminated by the Transfiguration. There, disciples are given a little insight into the glories of Heaven. They are increasingly being given a fully revelation of who Jesus is. However, whatever level of revelation we have, there is no excuse for rejecting Jesus. The call to follow him is the call to obediently go where and when he calls us even when it is costly and involves suffering.

17 Neighbours

The parable of the Good Samaritan is sandwiched between Jesus sending out the 72 to spread news of the coming kingdom and Jesus' conversation with Mary and Martha about whether Mary should be helping the Lord.

17.1 Read Luke 10:1-16

Jesus now appoints a further group of his disciples to be sent out. The language mirrors the sending of the twelve. Textual variants differ on whether it is 70 or 72 that are sent out.¹³¹ The number, like 12 is symbolic. Jews traditionally thought in terms of 70 or 72 nations of the World. Moses had also appointed 70 spirit filled helpers with another 2, taking us to 72 additionally included by the Spirit. Though Nolland argues that Luke would not want the second link to dominate as it might put the focus on Moses' limited capacity and needing help.¹³²(v1). Whilst this seems like a large number, Jesus suggests that it doesn't provide enough workers compared to the size of the expected harvest. They are to ask "the Lord of the Harvest" for more workers to share the task. God is sovereign over the mission of the Gospel (v2). Furthermore, as well as being small in number, Jesus compares their vulnerability to sheep. It's as though he has sent the lambs out right into the middle of a pack of wolves (v3). This vulnerability is marked out by their need to travel light without spare supplies or money.. The smallest of the team, their vulnerability in the face of danger and their lack of practical support, or at least a safety net should encourage their dependence on Jesus (v4).

They were not to move around looking for better support but as soon as they found somewhere to stay, they were to remain there, accepting the home owner's hospitality, recognising them as a peaceful person. Whilst they were not to take extra supplies and so demonstrate their faith in God, they were to expect God to provide through others. This links to a principle, the worker is worth paying and so their work has value and so should be supported (v5-7).

This applies both to a specific home where they are welcomed and to the reception they receive from specific towns. If they are welcome then they are to accept hospitality, proclaim the good news and to work miracles (v8-9). If rejected, then they are symbolically to demonstrate that they will have nothing more to do with the place, they are completely clean of it, by shaking the dust from their feet. However, even though they are rejected, they know that God's kingdom has "come near". In other words, its representatives have been visibly present so that the people have been given the opportunity to respond in submission to the true king. That they have refused the overt and obvious arrival of the Messiah puts them in a worse place on judgement day than Sodom and Gomorrah. If those cities were severely judged when they did not have the full light of the Gospel, how worse it is for those who deliberately refuse Jesus himself when given full revelation? (v10-12).

Jesus develops this theme by specifically addressing the towns and villages of Galilee and pronouncing woe upon them. The people there have had the opportunity to see great miracles, to know the signs of the kingdom and yet have rejected it. If other places outside of Israel that were subject to judgement had the same opportunity God's people had, then they would have repented (v13-15). Jesus draws a connection between him and his followers, the choice whether or not to listen to them reflects their choice about him. They are truly his ambassadors. This both means that

¹³¹ Morris prefers 72, see Morris, Luke, 200. Nolland also seems to lean towards "72" suggesting that it is easier to see how a number might be dropped off than added in. However, he also notes that in Jewish tradition, the numbers are seen as interchangeable. Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 549.

¹³² . Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 549.

they can expect to be treated like their master and also that an action in favour or against them represents that person's attitude to Jesus (v16).

17.2 Read Luke 10:17-24

The seventy-two return. They are overjoyed and surprised because they have experienced unexpected success. Whereas there had been failure by Jesus' followers to cast out the demon after the Transfiguration, now the demons do submit (v17).

Jesus is not surprised. He reminds them that he has given this authority. He has authority over the demons because he has authority over their master. Satan himself has already fallen. Jesus was there in eternity to see Lucifer cast out (v18-19). However, as amazing as all of this is, far more exciting is that their "names are written in heaven." This is another way of reminding them that they are citizens of God's kingdom. Jesus is pointing to their identity and status which comes not from the power that they have over the enemy but the relationship that they have to him (v20).

Having spoken to them, Jesus prays for them. He speaks to God as his father, a reminder too that if he is Jesus' Father, then they too get to call him that. He prays "full of the Holy Spirit." Remember that this indicates a prophetic element to what he says but also captures the sense of Jesus and indeed the entire Trinity's shared delight in what the 72 are reporting and more importantly in what he has just said to them about their identity in him (v21a). First Jesus gives thanks and praise because the things he has been teaching them about God's kingdom, things that "the wise", the religious and philosophical elite have been unable to see but their eyes and ears have been opened to his message. This is God's pleasure or desired will. The great and mighty are humbled by their ignorance but God chooses to entrust his good news to those who are like little children, a pointer to their low status as invisible nobodies (v21b).

Notice that everything revealed to the 72 is through Jesus because the Father has chosen to reveal his will to him. As The Son, Jesus uniquely knows his heavenly father and so he is the one who can reveal what God is like and what God's purpose is to others. In fact, we might argue that it is his Sonship and what that means for their status which is the thing revealed. It is only because we know Jesus is The Son that we can know God as The Father. The language here sounds very close to John's Gospel in style and could indicate that John was the source for this quote. The text is sometimes referred to as "The Johannine Thunderbolt" (v22).

For emphasis, Jesus tells the disciples again that they are blessed. They have been able to see, hear, experience and understand things that none of the great leaders and prophets of the past were able to. Specifically, they have seen the Messiah, the Son of God arrive (v23-24).

17.3 Read Luke 10:25-37

One of the Torah teachers comes to test Jesus. He asks him "What must I do to inherit eternal life." We need to be careful about reading anachronistically onto the question modern thinking about the after-life. This isn't about "can I be sure I will go to heaven when I die." Tom Wright suggests that "eternal life" might be best rendered "life of the age to come."¹³³ In other words, he wants his life to be in God's new kingdom. He is asking about the citizenship that the 72 have been told they have. The age to come was the age that would be ushered in when David's heir, the Messiah came. This would be eternal and so it would mean life for ever, without death and decay for him. It was also specifically associated, for those who expected it, with the resurrection of the dead. So, whilst we

¹³³ Wright, *How God became king*, 44.

should not overlay our modern perspective of eternal life onto it, there isn't a complete disconnect. It's not that our understanding of what the phrase means is completely alien to what Jesus meant but it means it is deficient. Eternal life is more than but not less than what we mean by life after death.

The man asks about what he must do to inherit, how can he access this. Inheritance language is significant too. Jesus has talked about the poor, meek and mourners as heirs of the kingdom. The expectation was that you inherited the blessings of the covenant through Abraham. So, another aspect to things here is that the person is asking "How do I guarantee my place within the covenant as one of Abraham's heirs." This suggests some recognition too that it wasn't enough to simply be a physical descendent of The Patriarchs (v25).

Jesus' response is to ask a question back. "Come on you're the expert and you know that it is the Law/Torah that tells us how to do this. What does it say?" The man responds by quoting the two commands recognised as being the greatest and summing up the Law. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart ... and your neighbour as yourself." It is important to make two clarifications here. First, "all your heart, mind and soul" is not intended to indicate three seats of will, as though we are divided up like that. Rather, it's a way of saying "love completely, with all that you are." Secondly, "as yourself" is not intended to indicate that we need to love ourselves, it's not that we need self love in order to give out to others, nor that we should that in equilibrium. We are meant to put others first, to prefer them, to sacrifice ourselves for them. It's more that there is a recognised way in which most people tend to care for and prioritise themselves. The Law tells us to prioritise others and to treat them with that level of care even at cost to yourself. Jesus confirms that the man has answered correctly (v27-28).

The conversation would have ended there but the man is not satisfied. Luke tells us that he was trying to justify himself. This might partly be about not wanting to be seen to have lost, or failed to win the debate. He hasn't really scored any points over Jesus. In fact, it might be argued that Jesus had made him look foolish by saying "It's obvious." The man's whole career relied on it not being obvious, on needing people like him to interpret the Law. Jesus is suggesting that the Law needs obeying rather than interpreting. The scribe is potentially redundant. Then there is the question about whether or not he is righteous, has he kept the law. So, he asks the question "Who is my neighbour?" This is surely the bit that needs interpreting by Scribes and it was important so that you could know if you had managed to obey the Law. Notice that he is less interested in attempting to define what it means to love God whole heartedly (v29).

So, Jesus tells a story about a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho who is attacked, beaten robbed and left for dead. Three people pass by, a priest, a Levite (another descendant of Levi but not directly from the priestly line of Aaron who still would have had temple duties) and a Samaritan. One might expect the first two to be willing to stop, they should be the man's "neighbour" as fellow Israelites, they would also be those who knew the Law well and were seen to interpret, keep and mediate it. However, for whatever reason, whether fear of the robbers, fear of becoming unclean through contact with a body or simple lack of compassion (we are not told), they pass by. It's the detested Samaritan who instead of leaving a Jew, his enemy for dead, stops to help and shows compassion (v30-35)

Jesus' question is "Who is the one acting as a neighbour here?" The answer, perhaps given grudgingly, is "the one who helped." It's the Samaritan. The immediate implications are first that those who knew the Law and were ethnic kinsmen did not act as neighbours, whereas the one considered not to be a neighbour and not to know God's Law did act as a neighbour. Jesus tells the

man to go and be like the Samaritan. In other words instead of calculating and attempting to work out what the Law meant by “neighbour” to focus on loving others as himself (v36-37).

17.4 Read Luke 10:38-42

The third event Luke includes takes place at Martha and Mary’s home. We know from John’s Gospel that they were Lazarus’s sisters and they were in Bethany, close to Jerusalem. This may refer to a prior visit when Jesus went up to the festival earlier in his ministry or may have been brought forward from his final week. Martha welcomes Jesus and offers hospitality. Mary also welcomes Jesus and sits to listen to his teaching, presumably with the disciples and other men (v38-39).

Martha is busy with the practicalities of hospitality. She has no time to stop and listen to Jesus. She gets frustrated and asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her. Jesus recognises her concern and busyness. However, he says that there is actually only one thing that matters, Martha has omitted to worry about the one crucial thing whereas Mary has done it, so she has chosen the better thing. True hospitality means actually giving time to the guest and listening to them. When the guest is the Lord himself, that matters even more (v38-41)

17.5 What matters

There have been two temptations when it comes to the parable of the Samaritan. First, there has been a nervousness about becoming focused on law and ethical teaching about neighbourliness and doing good. Does this take us away from the Gospel and grace? So, the tendency is to try and put Jesus quickly into the story as the Samaritan. It is true of course that Jesus was rejected and treated like a Samaritan, in fact, some of the gossip about him suggested he wasn’t really Jewish but was a Samaritan. Perhaps the suspicion was that Mary had lost her virginity to someone travelling through Galilee. However whilst we can tell the story with Jesus as the lead character, that doesn’t seem to be the main intention. Notice that when we do that, the tendency is to be caught up in the second temptation and to attempt to find meaning in every detail through allegory.

I think that is a misstep. We do best to treat the story at face value as an answer to the man’s question “Who is my neighbour?” I think this is confirmed by context. Both the 72 and Martha are challenged by Jesus to not be distracted and focus on what truly matters. Indeed, we might note the surprise in all passages: places outside of Israel stand up better to God’s judgement, those you expect to be in by doing the right thing or having the right connections are not whilst those who might be assumed to be outside or in the wrong turn out to be in the right place and doing the right thing whether a Samaritan traveller or a woman sitting and learning as a disciple in a male only sphere.

What matters then of course is not our ability to carefully define the Law but the state of our hearts. The scribe wanted to make sure he understood the law and defined neighbour properly so he could keep the law just as Martha was focused on the busyness of hospitality. The disciples needed to be reminded that it wasn’t their power and gifting that mattered but God’s verdict on them as citizens of heaven and by implication this made them, the poor in spirit, meek and persecuted mourners of the beatitudes. Whilst they were Jews, sent on a Jewish/Galilea mission, the symbolic numbering linked them to the nations, a reminder that those currently outside would be included.

This brings us back to the point of the Law as summed up in the two greatest commandments, love. This is whole hearted, undistracted, undiverted love for God which flows out to others. The disciples risked being distracted by their excitement about exorcisms, the priest and Levite were distracted

from loving the man in need, just as the scribe risked being distracted and Martha was distracted by her worries.

This does incidentally bring us back to the Gospel because at some point the penny should drop that we are not capable of loving in that way, undivided, undistracted, whole heartedly. That's exactly why we need a saviour. If inclusion in the kingdom as heirs of the age to come is not based on ethnicity nor what we do, if outsiders are included as neighbours, if Jesus has appointed ambassadors to the 72 nations and not just the 12 tribes of Israel, then the good news is for everyone.

18 Teach us to pray

Luke joins Matthew in including a version of what became known as the Lord's Prayer. However, unlike Matthew, Luke separates the prayer off from the Sermon on the Mount. This may reflect the structuring of the Gospels to make points but also, as likely is that Jesus repeats in private, teaching he has given publicly. In other words, the sense here would be:

"Jesus can you show us how to pray"

"Well do you remember what I said on the mountain?"

In Matthew, the context is fleshed out teaching on prayer. He will warn against publicly showing off, and repetitive prayer. They can trust God, as loving father to respond to their requests because he knows what we need even before we ask.¹³⁴

Matthew will also develop the theme of forgiveness, linking the need for us to show forgiveness with us receiving forgiveness.¹³⁵ It is not possible to receive the generosity of God's grace whilst we grip tight to our own grievances.

18.1 Read Luke 11:1-4

The form of words is given here in response to the disciples' request for teaching on how to pray. They have seen him praying and want to learn. John the Baptist had instructed his disciples on prayer and they want the same(v1). The first thing Jesus does is teach them to address God as "Father", just as he does. God is "our father in heaven", identifying his exalted position and otherness so that God is both transcendent and imminent.

Ian Paul suggests that we should read the three desires expressed, that God's name be made holy, that God's kingdom should come and that God's will be done, should be read together so that these things should be done on earth as in heaven, though not all manuscripts include the locating phrase "on earth" in Luke. In other words, we should see this as a single petition for the coming of God's kingdom leading to greater reverence for God marked by obedience to him (11:2).¹³⁶

Next, they are to ask God to supply their needs. The bread they are to ask for is what is required for subsistence, hence the translation "daily." (v3). In the wilderness, Jesus had been tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread. Jesus' response to Satan's temptation was to remind him of the Scripture which says we don't live by bread alone. So, we should not be surprised to see Jesus' teach on prayer that it isn't just about practical needs. Our daily bread will be spiritual as well as physical. So the follow on is first that we will know God's forgiveness, just as we demonstrate a forgiving heart ourselves. Note a variation from Matthew here with Luke's account having "sins" rather than "bets." Nolland sees this as a Lucan modification but it can equally be seen as a variation due to a different setting.¹³⁷ Secondly, we are to pray that the Father will not "lead us into temptation."

This may seem a strange thing to say. God does not tempt us.¹³⁸ Though, crucially, Nolland (correctly) argues that "there is no linguistic justification for avoiding attribution to God of the trial in

¹³⁴ Matthew 6:5-8.

¹³⁵ Matthew 6:14-15.

¹³⁶ Ian Paul, Do we pray the Lord's Prayer wrongly? www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/do-we-pray-the-lords-prayer-wrongly/ (accessed 14/06/2024).

¹³⁷ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 618.

¹³⁸ James 1:13-14.

view.¹³⁹ However, there are a couple of possibilities here. First of all, the same word is used to mean “test” and “tempt.” The devil tempts because his aim is to lead us into sin. God tests because he aims to prove and refine us. The difference is motivation and outcome. The prayer could be understood to mean either that God will use our suffering and testing to refine us rather than allowing us to be tempted and to fall or could be a plea that God will allow us to escape the worst of the trial. Jesus himself would pray “let this cup pass from me.” I see nothing wrong in expressing our desire not to suffer, so long as we submit to Jesus’ will. Finally, it is possible that the prayer states negatively “don’t tempt us” as deliberate understatement when by implication we are asking God to lead us in good paths and to protect us from evil and temptation. The negative statement would then function rhetorically. I am inclined to suggest that the phrase is so rich as to allow all of the above meanings to be included. They compliment rather than contradict each other (v4).

18.2 Read Luke 11:5-13

Jesus tells a parable. He encourages his hearers to imagine having visitors come to them late at night when they have nothing in and the shops are closed. What do you do in that situation? You go and knock on your neighbour’s door. They may be inconvenienced at the late hour and reluctant to come and help. Friendship may not be enough to motivate them but the fact that you have the “impudence” or “audacity” to go round at that time might cause them to say “okay I’ll get up and give you the bread”, if only to get rid of you (v5-8). This is used by Jesus as an encouragement to persevere in prayer, to “ask, seek, knock.” We should be bold and persistent in our faith. The encouragement is that we will find what we are looking for, receive what we ask for (v9-10).

In a further example, Jesus asks fathers to consider how they would respond to their children’s request for things. You wouldn’t give them stones, snakes and scorpions instead of bread, fish and eggs would you?¹⁴⁰ Then he says that if we are capable of getting it right, we can even more confidently be sure that God will. Note the provocative description of his audience of earthly fathers as “evil”. This was another rebuke to those who were proud of their place in the Abrahamic covenants and their Torah keeping but Jesus regards as an “evil generation” because they are sinners (v11-13).

The second example helps us to understand the sense of the first better. It’s not that God is like the grumpy, reluctant neighbour, or the mean judge in a later parable (Luke 18:1-8). Rather, there is a sense of “even more...” If those people will give grudgingly then, even more so will the loving Father give generously.

18.3 What exactly has Jesus taught them about prayer?

Whilst the prayer has been incorporated into much public formal liturgy, there are two big clues that this wasn’t what Jesus intended. First, in Matthew, there are the strong warnings about empty, hypocritical public performances. Secondly, in Luke, Jesus is responding to questions arising from his disciples observing his own personal prayer life.

So, whilst I see no harm in using this form of words as a prompt to shape our prayers, we should recognise that Jesus tells us “how to pray” not “what to pray” here and in Matthew 6. Prayer is about whole hearted dependence and trust on God for everything that comes from a changed (forgiven and forgiving) heart.

¹³⁹ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 618.

¹⁴⁰ Note Matthew only includes the two examples, bread and fish (Matthew 7:9-12).

19 D-Day

In 1945, the allies began their long awaited counter attack against Hitler to remove him from western Europe. Troops were amassed, the Americans, increasingly the most powerful military power in the world had joined the war and on D-Day, June 6th, a massive naval and land-amphibious assault was launched,

Apparently the “D” stands for “Day”, it was “The Day”, hence we are in fact referring to “Day-Day.” However, “D-Day” is often used, derivatively to refer to a significant moment a turning point, a decision day when people must chose where they stand. There are parallels with the events leading decision up to and including Holy week. There was a sense both that D-Day was coming because “The Day” was coming when God would act in power and because that required a decision from people as they were called to choose sides.

19.1 Read Luke 11:14-28

Jesus casts out a demon which has caused the possessed person to be mute. His opponents accuse him of using Baal Zebub’s authority and power to do the miracle. Baal Zebub or Baal-Zebul was the full title of title of a Canaanite and Philistine god with “Baal”, as we sometimes encounter a Canaanite deity in the Old Testament simply meaning “Lord” or “master”. Baal Zebub was therefore either “Lord of the heavenly dwellings”, Lord of Dung or “Lord of the Flies”. It’s uncertain whether the latter two options reflect a better rendition of the name or whether rather this was a deliberate Israelite corruption of the former. By this time, the name seems to have become closely associated with demons and probably Satan himself as the Prince of Demons (v14-15)¹⁴¹ Other observers did not go so far as to accuse Jesus but were not satisfied with his miracles and exorcisms so demanded a greater sign (v16).

Jesus addresses those accusing him of using demonic power to cast out demons first. His point is tat kingdoms divided by factions don’t survive long and if someone is using demonic power to attack and control over demons then Satan’s kingdom is embroiled in civil war (v17-18). Satan himself is using another third party to come in and do his dirty work, to deal with internal trouble, this suggests that he is weak and dependent. What is not disputed is that Jesus has the power to cast out demons but why then the presumption that hi sown power is demonic? Is that the only source of power? Other Jews claimed the same ability, so where did they get their power from. Jesus’ opponents must either recognise that an alternative source of authority, God himself, was possible or by implication they were accusing their own allies (v19). Jesus drives the point home because there is a “so what”, if it is God’s power at work, then God’s kingdom is present. This begins to address the demands for sign evidence too. The signs were already there, pointing to something great from God happening (v20).

So, what is happening? Jesus compares the situation to one where a strong man is in apparent control of a heavily armed house. He is safe and secure unless someone stronger turns up. They are then able to subdue the strong man, remove the source of his strength, represented by his armour and to take control. Now, this analogy would have been obvious to normal messianic expectations. The Messiah would have to be stronger than the Romans to overpower, disarm and subdue them. However, Jesus here insists that the strong man who must be defeated is no mere human ruler or empire but Satan himself. The shocking suggestion is that Israel is not merely under a foreign power’s subjugation but under the rule of Satan himself, God’s arch-enemy.

¹⁴¹ C.f. Morris, *Luke*, 215.

The issue then is not “who is Jesus with?” Whose side is he on, whose power is he using? Jesus is the one with ultimate power, he does not need to rely on Satan’s power. So, the more pressing question is “are you on Jesus’ side.” There isn’t a third option, if you are not on Jesus’ side, you are with his enemies and they are defeated and scattered (v21-22).

Matthew includes additional material at this point including warning against the unforgivable sin, which Luke will include in the next chapter and also teaching about how the heart’s roots are shown by its fruit. The responses people were making to Jesus exposed their hearts, especially when they were ready to slander something good as being evil.¹⁴²

To demonstrate, the importance of the decision further, Jesus tells a parable about a demon. I don’t think we are necessarily meant to treat this as literal, practical instruction in demonology. If a demon is cast out, it will look for another host to possess, a place to stay. Eventually it might come back to the original possessed person and find them, like an empty house, swept clean and tidied. They will repossess the person and will be joined by their friends. The man is now in a worse position, he was possessed by one demon, now he is under the control of seven. The parable applies first to Israel/Judea. If the king has arrived and defeats God’s enemies but the people do not recognise him as the true king and enthrone him, then they find themselves like the demon possessed man. Of course, that was historically true, Israel had returned from exile but had been unable to re-establish the Davidic kingdom and so a succession of foreign powers, leading to the might of Rome has come to occupy. It also points to our own spiritual danger if we do not make Jesus our king (v23-26).

At that point Jesus receives some friendly heckling. A woman announces that Jesus’ mother is blessed, or lucky to have him! She obviously approves of Jesus powerful miracles and his rhetoric. Jesus isn’t satisfied with this kind of praise though. In fact, it is not only those who falsely accuse or doubt Jesus who are in danger. Remember, you are either for or against him. So, being amazed and Jesus and even praising him without becoming one of his disciples is not enough. Jesus says that true blessing is reserved for those who listen to him and obey him (v27-28). Matthew seems to see a tie in here with the occasion when Jesus’ mother and brothers came looking for him and so includes that event at a similar point in his Gospel, just after the Beelzebub accusation and Jesus’s comments on “the sign of Jonah.” The point being that Jesus’ concern was for those of faith and so true blessing belonged to those who received his word rather than his flesh and blood relations.¹⁴³

19.4 Read Luke 11:29-32

The crowds continue to increase but it seems that many are curious onlookers joining the second group of sceptics, those demanding further proof and bigger signs. Jesus evaluates this scepticism as evidence of their heart-states. They are “a wicked generation.” The language here echoes the assessment of the Israelites in the wilderness who despite God’s miraculous signs and provision grumbled. He says that no such sign will be forthcoming. The only sign they will receive is “The sign of Jonah.” What was Jonah’s sign to the Ninevites? Well, first and foremost it was the simple sign of him preaching judgement. The context does suggest that from Luke’s perspective, the Ninevites responded to simple preaching and this should be enough for Israel (v29-30).¹⁴⁴ However, given that in Matthew’s account (Matthew 12:39-40) Jesus will link his death and resurrection to Jonah’s three nights in the fish’s stomach I think it is reasonable to see this as alluded to, so that the full sign of

¹⁴² See Matthew 12:30-37.

¹⁴³ Matthew 12:46-50.

¹⁴⁴ See Darrell L Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53 (BECNT. Grand Rapids MI.: Baker Academic, 2009)*, 1095-1096.

Jonah does start with him preaching judgement but also includes his death and resurrection experience in the fish.¹⁴⁵

The unbelief of “this wicked generation” is again compared unfavourably with Gentiles from history. The Queen of Sheba came to hear Solomon but the Jews reject Jesus who is greater in wisdom than him. The Ninevites repented in response to simple preaching, yet Jesus comes with signs and wonders and the people are not satisfied, demanding more (v31-32).

19.5 Read Luke 11:23-36

Jesus uses the image of someone lighting up a light again, as previously, the proverbial point is that you don’t light a lamp to hide it away out of sight (v33). It’s important to check the context to see what point the parable is making. This time, the lamp identified is our eyes. Light enters our bodies through our eyes, in other words, we see by the light (v34). Light is needed for health and so, if you live in the darkness, your body will become sick and die. The point then is again about discernment, about seeing clearly with our spiritual eyes. Those who fail to see the truth about Jesus are classified as blind by Jesus (v35-36).

19.6 Read Luke 11:37-52

Jesus is invited to dinner by a Pharisee but the Pharisee is surprised and seemingly judgemental; when Jesus doesn’t participate in ceremonial washing (v37-38). Jesus’ response is that the Pharisees will wash everything, cups, bowls, not out of hygiene concerns but ritualistically to make them ceremonially clean. However, they forget that what really matters is what is going on in the inside, in their hearts and minds. They lack compassion and instead are greedy and selfish (v39-41).

Jesus pronounces a series of woes on the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. They tithe to the nth degree but neglect justice and the love of God. Note, Jesus has no problem with their tithing but says they should have pursued justice as well. They love status and respect. They are like “unmarked graves.” The problem with these was that if you walked over it, you would become ceremonially unclean due to your close contact with a dead body.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the Pharisees for all their piety drew people into their hypocrisy and hard-heartedness making their hearts unclean (v42-44).

A scribe complains that Jesus is insulting them too, as though that is a surprise! Perhaps the tone is to the effect that maybe Jesus could criticise populist Pharisees but to criticise the experts in the Law was to reject their expertise and therefore to insult the Law itself. We do well not to confuse the infallibility of Scripture with the infallibility of interpretation (v45).

If the man hoped Jesus would either exclude the lawyers or back down, he was mistaken. Jesus now includes the teachers of the Law in his woes. They burden others with rules but don’t help them to obey God’s Word. If the Pharisees were like unmarked tombs, the scribes were all for making and honouring literally tombs with monuments to remember the dead prophets. However, it was their spiritual predecessors who killed the prophets in the first place. The lawyers then as the representatives of Israel’s hypocritical relationship to the Law are condemned. I take the reference to “this generation” to describe Israel as a nation standing in defiance to Yahweh over time rather than the Jews around at Jesus’ time. Note that this does not mean that all Jews or that Jews alone were

¹⁴⁵ So, I agree with Hendrickson that we must read the two accounts together. William Hendrickson, *Luke* (Repr. 1997. New Testament Commentary. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1978), 627.

¹⁴⁶ Bock, *Luke* 9:51-24:53, 1117.

responsible for Jesus' death. Rather, there was always a believing generation running through their history as well just as unbelief and opposition stretches to all ethnicities and backgrounds(v47-51).

The final woe is a judgement on their attitude to knowledge. They enjoy study but it is for their own selfish purposes. They love to grow their own intellectual knowledge but fail to clearly communicate God's Word to others (v52).

Jesus leaves the meal and it seems that as well as facing on going opposition, he is immediately subjected to a barrage of questions, challenges and insults (v53-54).

19.7 Eyesight check

If our eyes are the light to our bodies, then healthy (spiritual) eyesight is crucial. Jesus' opponents were like the blind or partially sighted, unable to see who Jesus was and God's true glory for themselves, they became a trap for others who looked to them to lead them closer to God and teach them to be holy. The Scribes and Pharisees could not do this and instead, like the man with seven more demons, they left people worse off after encountering their form of spiritually.

20 Fools wisdom

“Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Jesus is often portrayed as a king like David but we also see people coming to him to benefit from his wisdom and have their disputes settled just like Solomon did. Well, if Jesus is the true and better Solomon, then we should not be surprised to see him point to the source of true wisdom and call his hearers to fear God.

20.1 Read Luke 12:1-3

A large crowd of thousands is gathering around Jesus, they are so packed in that they risk trampling one another. Jesus focuses not on the crowd but on his disciples. He warns them not to be affected the Pharisees’ leaven. This is language he uses elsewhere, on a boat crossing of Galilee. Yeast or leaven would affect a whole batch of dough, even though small. The Pharisees had a fault which people have been tempted to dismiss as minor, they were after all externally righteous, not murderers, thieves or traitors. However, Jesus says that we are not to treat such faults as minor because they influence and affect a person’s whole life and the whole community (v1).

For the Pharisees, it was their hypocrisy. The disciples were to beware and not make the same mistake. They could not assume that they could put on one appearance in public whilst holding different, private views and priorities. Secret things will soon be revealed. Again, the theme is of light illuminating the darkness and revealing truth (v2-3).

20.2 Read Luke 12:4-12

Who do you fear? Jesus tells the crowd that they are not to fear other human beings, even those with authority to condemn to death. He may have in mind both the Roman overlords here and the Jewish authorities that were seeking his life. Some of his disciples may at this stage have been apprehensive about continue to follow Jesus. The question of counting the cost of discipleship was becoming more and more of a pressing issue. Jesus of course encourages his followers to first count the cost but it is important that they get the right valuations before doing the sums (v4).

So, they shouldn’t fear those who can only harm the body. Even Satan’s powers are limited in that respect. They are to fear the one who has power, not just over life and death but over eternity. In other words, they should fear God. Gehenna was a valley outside of Jerusalem which became infamous as a place where refuse was dumped and burnt. The term became synonymous with Hell. Note that the Gospel writers will sometimes refer to Hades, the Greek term for the afterlife or spirit world, that could be confused with the general fate of all post death and pre the Resurrection, reference to Gehenna makes it clear that we are talking about eternal and final judgement and punishment (v5).

What does it mean to fear God? Well, Jesus doesn’t seek to motivate fear by labouring the point that God has the ability to serve eternal judgement. He doesn’t ramp up emphasise on God’s power or even his justice. Instead, he points to God’s sovereignty being seen in his detailed providential care. He gives the example of bird sold for a pittance at the market. They have little value to us but God knows each one of them. So, God cares for us, much more than sparrows. He even knows the very details of our lives right down to the number of hairs on your head (v7).

Then, Jesus shows how fear of God is worked out in practice. It means that when the disciples are challenged, accused, questioned, that they will have a choice. Do they seek to preserve their own life by disowning and denying Jesus or do they acknowledge that they are his followers even at risk of

death? If God controls out eternal destiny beyond death, then to acknowledge Jesus here will mean being acknowledged “before the angels”, or in Heaven. To disown Jesus now will mean that you will be disowned as not belonging to him in Heaven. Words here and now have eternal consequences (v8-9).

Then Jesus says something that doesn’t seem quite to flow. Although he has said that disowning him here means being disowned there, he goes on to say that even speaking against “the son of man”, a title Jesus uses to identify himself can be forgiven but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot. What does he mean by this? Does he mean that he is of lesser status than the Spirit? If so, then why not talk about blaspheming the Father too? The answer seems to be that Jesus is drawing a distinction between a one off failure or someone wrestling with the Gospel and serious defiance of God’s way and God’s will that utterly closes the door to the work of the Spirit in your life (v10).

The application of this then was that when the disciples faced trial, they did not need to worry. They had nothing to fear from human judges, even when facing the death penalty. Instead, if they chose to honour Christ, then they had confidence that they would not be disowned or abandoned in court. The Holy Spirit would be alongside them as their advocate, giving them the words to say (v11-12).

20.3 Read Luke 12:13-21

It’s clear that not everyone was paying attention to what Jesus was saying and that plenty of the hangers on were just looking for what they could get from Jesus. As with King Solomon, this meant that some came looking for him to use his wisdom to settle disputes. One man asks the Lord to settle an inheritance dispute. Jesus refuses to get drawn into the dispute and instead warns the man against greed and materialism (v13-15)

Jesus’ response could well be summed up as “Haven’t you been listening.” He tells a parable about a man who is focused on building up his wealth. His barns are full, so he plans to build bigger barns to fit it all in (v16-19). (v20-21). However, God speaks to him in the night and tells him that his time is up, he is going to die and must face judgement there and then. His worldly possessions were of no use to him now. Notice that if we are told to fear God because God controls eternity, then, if “fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, a fool is one who is more concerned with the here and now than eternity. So, God addresses him as a fool.

20.4 Read Luke 12:22-34

Jesus’ instructions about worry should be read in the context of the discourse on who to fear and not to fear and the parable of the rich fool. If we are not to fear those who only have control over the body and temporal existence, further if we are not to build confidence in earthly possessions, then we also do not need to worry about life in the here and now. Specifically, Christ’s followers are not to be anxious about food and clothing because there is more to life than these things (v22-23).

It is not possible Jesus offers two examples, birds (ravens) and flowers (Lillies). Neither are engaged in the kind of planning and industry associated with human economics (the birds’ lack of barns stand in contrast to the rich fool’s plans for bigger storehouses) but God provides for them. Ravens find food and shelter, flowers grow and without paying for expensive man made garments, look more beautiful and adorned than Solomon, Israel’s typical wise and wealthy king (v24-28).

God’s people are not to be like the people of the world, concerned about material things. Luke here draws on teaching that we find in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount in the context of the Lord’s Prayer. We can trust our heavenly father to know what we need and provide it, Matthew adds that

this is even before we ask. Instead, we are to prioritise seeking God's kingdom, trusting him to provide for our needs as well (v29-31).

Jesus addresses them as his "little flock", this both reminds them of their fragility and vulnerability. God chose the weak and foolish things of this world but also that he is the Good Shepherd. Reminding them of the beatitudes, he reassures them that God has given the kingdom to them. In other words, the benefits of citizenship belong to his followers (v32). So, instead of attempting to amass wealth here, they are to invest in heavenly treasure by giving away to the poor. "Treasure stored in heaven identifies the type of treasure, spiritual blessings. It does not necessarily mean that these will be obtained only when we get to heaven. As a tutor once pointed out, if you say that there is food in the fridge, you don't expect me to get into the fridge to enjoy it. However, treasure that doesn't corrode is also treasure available for more than this life, into eternity (v33-34).

20.5 Read Luke 12:34-48

The literal phrasing is the archaic "gird up your loins", someone prepared for active work would ensure that their tunic was tied and tucked up around their waist so as not to trip them up. A modern equivalent colloquialism might be "tighten up your belt" or put on your work clothes. The master may be at his wedding but the servants are not at the party yet, there is work to be done and so they must be ready for his return, then they can celebrate. They must also have lamps lit meaning that they will be watching and working through the night (v35-36). The good news is that this master, when he does arrive will not expect his servants to serve him as he continues his celebration, rather, he will strip down for work and serve them so that they can enjoy the wedding celebration (v37-38).

In a switch of metaphors, Jesus states that his coming will be like a thief turning up in the middle of the night. The house owner might wish that he knew and could prepare for the burglar but thieves don't pre-announce their arrival. The point then is readiness. Christ's followers are not to be distracted and focused on material and temporal things because their focus needs to be on God's eternal clock and purpose, watching and ready for the Lord (v39-40).

Peter interrupts Jesus to ask if the parable is just for the disciples or something Jesus is sharing with everyone. This perhaps links back to Jesus' explanation of how parables work to filter out the non-serious followers. So, perhaps Peter's question is a way of saying "I'm not following this, it all sounds a bit cryptic" Given that Jesus is describing his "coming" at a point when he is already with them and when there hasn't been prior discussion of a second coming, this is understandable (v41).

Jesus' "answers" but not with direct response to Peter. Instead, he simply expands on the parable. This might both confirm our suspicions that Peter's question was to do with interpretation and give the sense of "don't worry about other people and their response, first and foremost you need to hear this Peter." He focuses in on those who are stewards or managers in the household, and this clearly points to the apostles and future church leaders, those responsible for the care of the household and providing food (v42).

The good household manager cares for the other servants and is prepared and ready. The wicked household manager becomes careless, cruel and selfish because he doesn't believe the master is coming back anytime soon. The former will be rewarded, the latter receive just punishment. Note that the punishment will be proportionate to culpability, their level of knowledge or ignorance and intent. It will also be proportionate to the level of responsibility they have (v42-48).

20.6 Read Luke 12:49-53

Jesus has introduced the concept of judgement and punishment. This is perhaps not something we are comfortable with but nor, for different reasons would his first hearers. Even more shocking is Jesus' desire that this fire of judgement would come more swiftly (v49) It's not that they expected only peace for everyone, peace was for God's favoured people. However, Jesus is making it clear that there will be discipline for those who claim to be servants and indeed leaders within the Messiah's household. Furthermore, the point is that peace will not be immediate, there is conflict ahead, first Jesus himself must experience suffering through the crucifixion. This is perhaps why he longs for a speeding up of things because this means that the day of vindication and the full inauguration of his kingdom will come sooner (v50). In the meantime, rather than peace, there will be conflict that will divide families and friendships down the middle. Here is a vital signal that his kingdom will not work on ethnic lines but will be for children of the promise, this will unite across class, gender and ethnicity but it will also divide within those categories. If you need any strong argument against Christian nationalism or class warfare and an obsession with feminism, then you can find it here (v51-53).

20.7 Read Luke 12:54-59

Jesus critiques the crowd and being able to offer short term weather forecasts but lacking the wisdom and insight to know and discern the times. They know what the weather will do in the day ahead but cannot see what God has been doing and is doing right at that moment (v54-55). Now, it may seem that this is a harder thing but if they claim to be God's people and to know the Law and the Prophets then they should be able to discern what God is doing and to see his promises being fulfilled. So Jesus charges them with hypocrisy (v56).

He illustrates his point with another parable. If you know what is coming up, then you will respond accordingly. You would know to go settle a case you were likely to lose, if possible before it gets to court, just as today you might try and settle out of court or pay your fixed penalty fine for a driving offence rather than test your case in front of the magistrate and receive a worse fine. The point then is that they need to prioritise knowing the times, which means being aware not just of what God is about to do but also about how he works. If they realised this, then they would recognise that Jesus was the promised Messiah and realise that failing to fall in line behind him was to place them on the wrong side (v57-59).

20.8 Heaven and Hell

Luke 12 talks about heaven and hell. Judgement means being cast into hell, rewards are stored in heaven. The word translated "hell" is Gehenna. The Greek Scriptures also make use of the term "Hades" to refer to the after-life, this referred to the Greek concept of afterlife for the spirits in an shadowy underworld and is equivalent to Sheol or the Grave. It does seem to have the content of judgement in the Gospels though rather than being merely neutral, so that the rich man is tormented in Hades whilst Lazarus is far off, with Abraham, though this could suggest that they are in the same realm but that it is separated out.

The use of Gehenna makes it clear when the New Testament writers are referring to eternal judgement for the wicked rather than an interim resting place for the soul. The valley, surrounding Jerusalem had been used for child sacrifice by the kings of Judah leading to it being cursed by Jeremiah, It seems to have become associated with being a rubbish dump where fires were kept burning to dispose of waste and as a result of the imagery and it's cursed pass became synonymous in both Jewish and early Christian thinking with the concept of Hell as a place of eternal judgement.

We may be uncomfortable with the idea of hell and eternal judgement but we cannot ignore the fact that Scripture speaks in such terms, a reminder of the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God. At the same time, there are only 14 references to it in the New Testament, 12 in the Gospels. This means both that we cannot avoid the fact that it is used most often on the lips of Jesus but also that neither Jesus nor the apostles seemed to have relied heavily on encouraging fear of hell fire and damnation in their proclamation of the good news of the kingdom. Perhaps rather than worrying about whether there is enough mention of hell in our preaching, we should give it the same level of emphasis. This means that talk of hell should not overshadow our preaching but nor should it be absent from it.

As noted above, the description of “treasures stored up in heaven” does not primarily seem to point in the direction of things to look forward to when we die and go there. Heaven is first and foremost God’s dwelling place, the centre of his rule and reign, the seat of his will. Scripture will focus more on the sense that death will be followed by resurrection and that means Heaven coming to earth when we see a new heavens and a new earth. This does not mean that we can talk of unconscious souls sleep between now and then. Jesus tells the bandit on the cross next to him that “Today you will be with me in Paradise”, this is presumably the same place where the rich man sees Lazarus and Abraham. We may not be able to say much about life after death but we can say that there is life after death and that we will be with Jesus. However, we want to go on and talk about what NT Wright has dubbed “life after life after death.”

20.9 Wisdom

Proverbs tells us that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”. Jesus’ warning to fear he one who controls eternity is another way of putting this. Luke 12’s use of wisdom language gives it a proverbial feel. This may help us to see how to read it, the parables as just as much proverbs and this means that they may not appear to link easily together through linear logic. Like the Old Testament wisdom literature and the New Testament book of James though, it is possible to trace threads and themes throughout.

First, we see Solomon referred to and Jesus presented as the one who people turn to for their disputes to be resolved, just like Solomon. Jesus however is unconcerned with their petty disputes and encourages them to fix their eyes higher on what is greater and of lasting worth. He is the true and better Solomon.

That higher priority is also the other big theme or thread that holds things together, fear of the Lord means recognising that our eternal security and destiny is of greater importance than temporal matters. Fear of God is not about being scared. God is not a harsh and cruel master but it is about a healthy sense of awe and respect.

21 Sinners, repentance and forgiveness

In Jesus day, there wasn't really any question that sin was a problem, nor that it deserved judgement.. A culture that accepted the reality of sin may seem a long way from our "sinless and shameless" culture today. However, there were questions about the nature of sin and more pertinently who was a sinner. To be classified as a sinner was to be identified as someone separated out from God's people and looked down on.

In this section, we see Luke introduce an incident that is unique to his Gospel, the discourse about the tragic killing of festival pilgrims at the hands of Pilate and the loss of lives when the wall fell at Siloam. He also draws in material used elsewhere in the other Gospels as he narrates a number Jesus' parables here. The focus throughout is on the urgency of repentance.

21.1 Read Luke 13:1-9

Some people come to Jesus and report a horrendous, tragic atrocity to him. Pilate has had some Galileans killed. Worse than that, he has mixed their blood with sacrifice blood. This may indicate that they were carrying out their own ritual sacrifices close to the Temple which would indicate that it was at Passover.¹⁴⁷ Note that whilst this could fit with a number of contemporary events, we are not told the exact occasion, they are referring to.¹⁴⁸ It seems that there is an implicit question here, or at least Jesus takes there to be one and supplies an answer. He asks them if these men were any more guilty of sin than they were. It's a rhetorical question, the answer is "no." They are not to sit in judgement on those who suffered this tragedy but rather see it as an urgent warning that they must repent or they will face an even more serious judgement, eternal punishment (v1-3).

Jesus then offers another example. If the first one was of intentional harm, this, if not natural causes, was accidental. A wall had fallen on some people, killing them. Were they greater sins than others who did not die? Again, the answer is "no." However, the tragic deaths should serve as a warning to others not to treat God with contempt (v4-5).

Jesus sums up his point with a parable. He describes a farmer who has tried everything with a fruitless fig tree. The owner is willing to give things a bit longer and try new tactics but judgement is delayed not averted unless there is change. (v6-89).

21.2 Read Luke 13:10-17

Once again, Jesus is teaching on a sabbath day in the synagogue. A woman is present who is crippled so that she cannot straighten up. Luke tells us that this is caused by a spirit, distinguishing it from a natural illness. Jesus calls her over and declares that she is "free" from weakness/infirmity. Note that, tied in with the reference to a spirit, language of being bound and loosed is used throughout. When Jesus places his hands on her, immediately she is able to stand up straight and she rejoices (v10-13).

The synagogue elder is not so happy and complains that Jesus should have used the other 6 days in the week to do his healing work. He also tells the people present that they should come on other days to be healed. The sense is that this is a distraction from the real business of gathering (v14).

¹⁴⁷ See Bock, *Luke 9:51-21:53*, 1204-1205.

¹⁴⁸ See Bock, *Luke 9:51-21:53*, 1205.

Jesus takes his argument apart. First, he observes the hypocrisy of his opponents' position. They will happily give up the Sabbath to tend to their animals but not a human made in God's image. Secondly, he observes that the woman is a daughter of Abraham, or one of his descendants and heirs. Shouldn't she be able to enjoy the blessings of the covenant with him? Third, he points out that it is the enemy, Satan who has caused her to be sick. So, isn't the Sabbath actually the best day for her to be freed from her chains, healed and restored (v15-16).

His opponents are shamed but the rest of the people delight in what they see (v17).

21.3 Read Luke 13:30-31

Luke recounts two parables here that Matthew (for both) and Mark (for the first) include as part of a string of parables with farming themes that are hooked onto the Parable of the Sower.¹⁴⁹ In the first parable, a small seed is planted which grows into a tree providing shelter for the birds.

Some people have associated the bird in this parable with those who eat from the path in the parable of the sower and suggested sinister connotations. Is this a prophecy that the church will grow into a mighty institution and do the birds therefore, once again, represent Satanic activity, even within the shelter of the official church? This is to read the parables allegorically and treat the words as code used consistently across them. However, I don't think this is how we are meant to read them, rather we are to home in on the primary point. We should not assume then that a word will have the same application across each story told. Elsewhere, Jesus invites us to think positively when considering the birds and their lack of worry. So, I would take the parable at its most straightforward and obvious meaning, a promise that God's kingdom will grow, even if it appears small to Jesus' followers (v18-19).

In the second parable, a woman works a small amount of yeast into a large amount of flour, it works through the whole of the dough that she makes and so the bread rises (v20-21). Put both parables together and they point to the growth and influence of the Kingdom of God despite its apparent smallness.

21.4 Read Luke 13:22-30

Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem. Perhaps he is already beginning to lose followers who are uncomfortable with the direction of travel because he is asked if only a small number of people will be saved. Perhaps also, the person is thinking of those Scriptures which point to a faithful remnant (v22-23).

Jesus urges those with him to make every effort to get into God's kingdom through the narrow door. This might remind us of the description of two ways, the wide road to destruction and the narrow path to salvation. We might also think in terms of narrow windows and timeframes as Jesus says that the door won't be open for long. Jesus' follows need to make use of the opportunity now because they don't know when the door will close and judgement come (v24-25a).

Once time is up and the door closes, there are no second chances, those pleading for extra mercy will be told "I don't know you" (v25b-27) Jesus warns that his listeners will find themselves locked out of the party, looking on in distress as they see Abraham, the patriarchs and the prophets on the inside. Their distress will be heightened as they, descendants of Abraham watch on whilst the

¹⁴⁹ See Matthew 13:31-33 and Mark 4:30-32.

Gentiles are invited in (28-29). Those who seemed to be at the front of the queue to get entry will be last, they will miss out as others get to go in, recognised and known by the door keeper.

The proverbial words about the first being last are not, in this case then, about having to wait your turn. Rather, they are a serious warning that some who we expect to be first and sure certainties when it comes to salvation may not be.

21.5 Read Luke 13:31-35

Jesus is warned by some Pharisees that Herod has turned against him and is plotting his demise. We are not told whether this is a genuine warning from friends - which is possible, we shouldn't assume tight boundaries between Jesus and the Pharisees – or whether they are trying to discourage and threaten him to get him to move on (v31).

Jesus is undeterred and sends a message back to Herod to the effect that he is going to keep going about his business and cannot be stopped. Notice the mention here of “the third day.” Even if Herod or anyone else succeeds in killing Jesus they won’t and cannot stop him forever (v32). Jesus insists that he must complete the journey to Jerusalem, that he is safe outside but must go there because that is where the prophets are killed (v33), Jesus laments for Jerusalem because the city is the place where God’s prophets die instead of being a place of protection (v35).

21.6 What time is it?

Rather than being distracted by debates about theodicy¹⁵⁰and speculation about the moral status of tragedy victims, Jesus urges his hearers to repent. He then tells synagogue rulers that if they are more concerned with alleged technical law breaches than the life and health of a woman they they’ve missed the point of the Sabbath. He encourages a sense of urgency, warning that his hearers need to repent and follow now because there is only a narrow window before judgement comes.

We may prefer not to mention judgement, sin, repentance and Hell. We fear that this will put hearers off. Jesus has no qualms about dealing with those things because he knows that his time is coming. Are we alert to the urgency now and prepared to warn people, calling them into repentance?

¹⁵⁰ Understanding the cause of suffering and God’s involvement in it.

22 Welcome to the feast

Meals provide a frequent setting for Gospel events to the point that at least two authors have picked up on this as the basis for book themes and structures.¹⁵¹ Jesus is offered hospitality by various hosts, Pharisees through the tax collectors. These seem to be at least semi public affairs, hosts may have wanted to be seen with Jesus for his popularity to rub off. Guests along with hosts also appear to have other agendas, to watch Jesus and catch him out. Sometimes those serving him were simply seeking to bless him as with Mary and Martha or to learn from him and receive from him. For Jesus though, these settings frequently provided teaching opportunities.

22.1 Read Luke 14:1-6

It's the Sabbath and Jesus is a guest at a meal, presumably following on from Synagogue. It's hosted by a Pharisee who is described as prominent, or a ruler, so one of the leading members of the school.¹⁵² and other scribes and pharisees are present. A sick man is present and Jesus calls him forward so that he is the focus of attending (v1-2). Then he begins to question the scrobes and Pharisees

"Is it okay to heal on the Sabbath or does Torah forbid it?" (v3).

"What would you do if it was personal, if a family member or one of your livestock needed help?"(v5).

They are unable to answer his questions (v2 & v6). Jesus goes ahead and heals the man (v4).

22.2 Read Luke 14:7-14

Jesus continues to observe the behaviour of those at the meal. He notices that people are seeking to sit in the best places, the seats of honour (v7). We may think of a top table at a wedding, however, this would be different. The guests would recline on couches around three sides of low table to eat with one side free for food to be brought in. Honoured guests would recline closest to the host.

Jesus warns them that this is an unwise way to behave, if a more important guest shows up, they may be pushed back down the seating rank and embarrassed. Better to take a seat further back and then be invited to come forward. The former leads to shame, the latter to greater honour (v7-11)

Then he offers advise to hosts, starting with his host that day. He tells him not to invite guests who have position and status so can invite you back. Instead, focus on inviting those who have nothing to give back, the poor and disabled (v13-14).

22.3 Read Luke 14:15-24.

Someone responds to Jesus advice by calling out, describing the greater blessing of being invited to the great feast of God's kingdom (v15).¹⁵³ Jesus responds with a parable. He describes a man who organises a great banquet and invites guests. Back in the days before mobile phone alarms, he sends

¹⁵¹ See Tim Chester, A meal with Jesus and Mike Ovey, Feasts of Repentance.

¹⁵² Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 745.

¹⁵³ It is possible that these meals were intended to act like symposiums, or similar to an after church discussion with semi-structured discussion around themes. If so, then the person here may be intending to move the discussion along. See Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 745.

out one of his servants to remind his guests on the day (v16-17). One after each other, they all make excuses. None of the guests turn up (Fv18-20).

The host is angry. He insists that the banquet will be fully attended. So, he sends his servant out into the town to invite in the poor, vulnerable and disabled, the outcasts who would not normally be invited (v21-22). There is still room, so he sends the servant out further afield, into the countryside. He insists that his house will be full but the original guests won't get to enjoy the feast (v23-24).

22.4 Read Luke 14:25-35

Large crowds are still continuing to follow Jesus. He challenges those with him. Have they really counted the cost of following him.? To follow Jesus, meant following him to the place of execution because he was heading to the Cross. More than that, it meant bearing your own cross, in other words, a willingness to die with and/or for Jesus (v26-27).

Jesus offers two examples, the building committing to a building project to erect a tower and the king deciding whether he can go into battle. It is important to know up front what the cost of commitment is. With Jesus, there is no hidden small print (v28-33).

Then Jesus talks about salt and saltiness. Pre fridges, salt was used as a preservative, rubbed into meat. However, it also enhanced flavour. However, if salt ceased to function as salt, then it was useless.¹⁵⁴ The implication here is that God's people are meant to be people who die to self in Christ in order to live for him in his resurrection (Romans 6). If Jesus' followers stopped doing that because they became a crowd of interested, curious hangers on then they would be like the salt that had lost its purpose (v34-35).¹⁵⁵

22.5. The cost of a meal with Jesus

There was a calculation for those who joined those earthly meals with Jesus. Would it benefit their own popularity, would they receive healing, might they learn something new, could they gain an advantage. There were potential benefits and potential costs. Ultimately as Ovey's book title alludes to, the benefit is a spiritual feast as well as a physical one. The cost is repentance. Identifying with Jesus was also to attract the ire of those who loved and held power.

This had a wider implication at the time, as the crowds were drawn to Jesus but he made sure to outline the cost for them, the cost was their own cross. Wider still, that need to count the cost has eschatological implications, the parable of the banquet and excuses represents the calculation that many have will make to ultimately turn down Jesus' great and gracious invitation for the priorities of this world.

¹⁵⁴ The Palestinian salt in mind would not have been in its pure form where it couldn't lose its saltiness/ This meant that "the sodium chloride could leach out of the impure salt in common use so that what was left lacked the taste of salt. Morris, *Luke*, 254.

¹⁵⁵ Bock comments that "The parallel Matt5:13 is more explicit in applying the image directly to crowds of potential disciples gathered around Jesus." He goes on to add "Useless 'discipleship' is of no value to God whilst useful discipleship pays the price to serve God." Bock, *Luke* 9:51-24:53, 1291.

23 Lost

Luke records three parables with a focus on something or someone who is lost, a sheep lost to a shepherd, a coin lost to its owner, a son lost to his father. Matthew also includes the parable of the lost sheep.¹⁵⁶ He introduces it in a slightly difference context following on from Jesus' teaching on how to respond to "little ones" and before his teaching on how to forgive and restore. This suggests that Matthew sees the sheep as representing those little ones but also the offending brother who needs to be brought back into the fold. Whilst John doesn't retell the parable, the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is central to his account,

23.1 Read Luke 15:1-7

Jesus is continuing to attract a crowd but the Pharisees are suspicious of those drawn to Jesus because they include tax collectors and those labelled as sinner (v1-2). Jesus responds by telling them a parable. In fact, he invites them into the story "If this happened to you Wouldn't you...." Part of the challenge of course is whether or not they would do what Jesus suggests. The scenario he offers is of a shepherd with 100 sheep, one is missing.¹⁵⁷ He suggests that you would go out and diligently search until you found the sheep, then bring it home. The suggestion is that this is exactly what his hearers would do. This tends to be disputed with the presumption being that the logical thing is for the shepherd to settle in, happy that he has his 99 sheep. It's often portrayed in one song as "reckless love", the 99 left for the sake of one. It is possible though that the shepherd, accountable for all of the sheep would seek to diligently search out the missing one (v3-5). Jesus observes that just as the shepherd would celebrate with his neighbours on his return, so, when someone who is spiritually lost is rescued, there is greater rejoicing for the unrighteous one now saved than the many people who didn't need rescuing (v6-7).

23.2 Read Luke 15:8-10

Jesus offers a second scenario, this time it is a woman who has 10 coins or drachmas. Each would be worth a day's wage.¹⁵⁸ She loses one and so, like the shepherd she keeps searching until she finds it (v8). This causes great rejoicing for her and her friends. (v9) Again, Jesus compares this to the extent of joy and rejoicing in Heaven when a sinner is found and saved (v10).

23.3 Read Luke 15:11-32

In a third, and much longer, parable, Jesus describes a father who has two sons, the younger demands his share of the inheritance early (v11-12). The father agrees to this and the son leaves home and in fact moves country. In a distant land, he squanders his inheritance and then when all has run out, famine hits. For a time, he seeks to earn a living as a pig farmer but still is not able to provide for himself and longs to eat the pigs' food (v13-16). Eventually he comes to his senses and

¹⁵⁶ Matthew 18:12-14

¹⁵⁷ Bock suggests that the shepherd is "of modest means" with flocks being up to 200 and large flocks having 300 sheep. I'm not sure we are meant to be attempting to calculate flock sizes and make implications. Rather, we have a round number. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1300.

¹⁵⁸ Some have made much of a tradition where bridal dowries were kept together on a headdress and suggested that this is in mind, so that the lost coin broke completeness. However, Bock argues that this was a later tradition so may be a red herring. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1303.

decides to return home. He is willing to enter into servitude as one of his dad's hired hands realising that they are better off than him (v17-19).

His father, however has different plans. He has been watching for his son's return and when he sees him at a distance runs to meet him. The son begins his rehearsed speech but the father cuts him short. He welcomes him back as his son, reclothes him and throws a banquet to celebrate. He announces that the Son was dead but is now alive (v20-24). The elder brother is jealous and refuses to come into the feast because he has served loyally but never had a party thrown for him. The parable ends with the father reminding him that the estate is his inheritance but that they are celebrating his brother's return from the dead (v25-32).

23.4 Lost and found

As is often the case with parables, the tendency has been to focus in on each parable and pour over the detail. This has led to much speculation as noted above about whether the shepherd was reckless in leaving the others behind. There have been attempts to allegorise the parables and identify each with different persons of the Trinity, The Son as the shepherd who comes to seek, the woman with her searching lamp likened to the Spirit and the Father, well I guess that's obvious!

However, I would argue that we would do better to step back and see all three together before focusing in on the punchline(s). This is true for Matthew's single use of the Lost Sheep where we saw above how it is used in the context of little ones and forgiveness. There are therefore two simple points. First we see something of Jesus' concern, there is an accountability for all that the Father has given to him. In John's Gospel, we are reminded that he will not lose any given to him. This means that Heaven rejoices when lost sinners are saved.

Secondly, the third parable offers the ultimate punchline. Here the parables are told in response to the Pharisees grumbling at the time Jesus gives to tax collectors and sinners. The end of the third parable offers a full response to this. They are acting like the older brother, failing to take joy in Christ's concern that the lost people of Israel should be saved.

24 Reckoning

Luke 16 brings together two parables, one is the story of a shrewd manager who is identified at first as dishonest but ends up commended. The second story tells us the fate of a rich man and the beggar who lived at his gate. Both parables are unique to Luke. Sandwiched between them is some teaching about what our attitude to wealth should be and this is linked with our attitude to the Law exemplified by the Law on adultery, divorce and remarriage. The point on material wealth, that you cannot serve two masters is made in Matthew as well as Luke at Matthew 6:24 where it forms part of the Sermon on the Mount. There it relates to Jesus' exhortation to build up treasure, or grow your investment portfolio in Heaven not on earth. The parables make the same point in narrative form. The two parables therefore can be seen as shedding light on the instructions in between.

24.1 Read Luke 16:1-9

Jesus tells a parable about a steward, responsible for managing his master's estate. He is accused of mismanagement. This is about wilful dishonesty rather than incompetence. His boss summons him in to give an account. It seems that he is given time to do this, however, he expects to be fired (v1-2).

The man realises that he is unlikely to find alternative work and so he sets about a plan. He calls in his master's debtors and begins settling their accounts in their favour, changing the ledger so that they owe less. He reckons that when he is fired, they will be grateful and look after him. This may be seen as dishonest in terms of his relationship to his master, however it is also possible that he was correcting things by removing the interest from the charges which should not have been charged.¹⁵⁹ He is also taking a calculated risk because the reduced debt also means that his commission is reduced(v6-7).¹⁶⁰

Exactly where the parable ends is disputed with some commentators ending it after verse 8a. On that reading, Jesus says that the master or Lord on finding this out, although no doubt angry at being defrauded again, actually commends the manager. He recognises his shrewdness and Jesus suggests that this kind of shrewd character is more typical of worldly people. They know how the world operates. God's people (those of the light) often do not (v8). However, some people have taken the parable to end at verse 7 in which case, it is Jesus himself who comments and commends the manager.¹⁶¹ My view is that it makes most sense for the parable to finish in v8 as the flow makes most sense with Jesus continuing to speak about the Lord in the parable.

Jesus' advice, or application from the story, is that we too should be shrewd. The manager used the opportunities available to him to build friendships. We too should use our opportunities including money and possessions to build friendships that will last beyond life here and now and into eternity (v9).

24.2 Are dishonesty and materialism commended?

Does this mean that Jesus is commending the "shrewd steward"? This has led to discussion at times about how it might be possible to justify the man's unethical behaviour. It is possible of course that the man's dishonesty applies only to the point up until his dismissal. It may be argued that if he was removing the interest and ending an act of usury then he acted righteously. I'm not persuaded by

¹⁵⁹ Morris, Luke, 263-264.

¹⁶⁰ Bock, Luke 9:51-24:53, 1341.

¹⁶¹ Bock, Luke 9:51-24:53, 1340.

this argument because it relies far too much on second guessing the intended meaning. Additionally, it begs the question as to why the man had not acted sooner. Why, if it was only his own impending destitution lead to his change of heart, would this be considered righteous?

I take the view that it is not Jesus who commands the man but the boss. The sense then is that he recognises that his employee has got one over him. Moreover, we need to determine what the actual lesson is that Jesus wants us to learn. The lesson that Jesus is drawing out is a simply one. We are not to learn from the manager's business practices and ethics. Rather, we are simply to learn from the way in which he makes decisions whilst he has the opportunity with an eye on the long term future.

In the same way, Jesus is not commanding the pursuit of wealth so much as saying that we should make the use of opportunities but see them from the perspective of eternal values and opportunities. In other words, we should look at the good things now and see how they can be used for the extension of God's kingdom.

24.3 Read Luke 16:10-18

Jesus's comments about being trusted with small things before greater things should be read in the light of his advice in verse 9. What does it mean to be trustworthy with worldly wealth? Surely it means using it for the benefit of God's kingdom. (v10-11) There is practical advice here about showing yourself to be trustworthy. However, I don't think we are meant to pick apart the meaning of being trusted with someone else's property before being trusted with your own too much. Perhaps there is a sense in which in this life we are seen as looking after what is Christ's and so in that sense on loan. However, we look forward to eternity when everything becomes permanent (v12).

When it comes to money and material wealth, the question is to do with mastery, do we steward/control it or does it own/steward/control us? Jesus insists that we cannot have two masters, it is either wealth or God. This should make it clear that materialism isn't condoned here. Rather, the point is about how we live now showing who we serve now and the eternal implications (v13).

Jesus' words expose the hearts of the Pharisees. They pretended to be pious but in fact loved money. The word used indicates fondness for silver but may have a wider meaning of greed.¹⁶² We might say that they were doing the opposite of what Jesus says, using the eternal treasures of God's Word and their relationship to God's covenant people in order to build up their own material wealth. Their response, instead of being convicted is to sneer and try to dismiss Jesus' words as silly (v14). Jesus' response to them is that they may be desperate to justify themselves but God knows their hearts and it is his verdict that matters. What humans approve and honour, God rejects and sees as abominable (v15).

Crucial for the Pharisees are two things, first, they need to understand the times that they live in. The kingdom of God has arrived, its imminent arrival announced by John. The Law and Prophets were proclaimed until then. We are not meant to see this as a distinct era or dispensation as though the problem with the Pharisees was that their views belonged with the prior dispensation. It's not that we have moved from the age of Law to the age of grace. Rather, the law and Prophets were proclaimed until John because they were pointing towards the good news of the kingdom and fulfilled in it. Now the kingdom has arrived and everyone is desperate to get in (v16). However,

¹⁶² BDAG, 1056.

because the Law and Prophets were part of God's redemptive purpose, pointing to the Gospel of the Kingdom, this means that Jesus fulfils rather than abolishes the Law. Or as Jesus puts it here, the world is more likely to end that one small bit of the Law to be erased out. A modern equivalent might be the phrase "hell will freeze over" (v17).

Jesus then offers an example of a Law that has not been erased, the command not to commit adultery. I think the reasonable inference here is that the Pharisees have been guilty of this. Jesus says that those who divorce and remarry are guilty of adultery. They cannot break their marriage covenant because someone better seems to have come along (v18).

24.5 Divorce and Remarriage

Whilst Luke's purpose for including Jesus' comments about divorce here are not intended to set out extensive ethical teaching on that subject but rather illustrate his larger point about the Law, questions will no doubt arise about what the Biblical position is on divorce and re-marriage.

The issue is picked up throughout the Gospels. In Mark, Jesus responds to a question from the Pharisees on the subject.¹⁶³ His disciples quiz him further later. This is Mark's summary of the conversation (Mark 10:10-12).

¹⁰ Later, when he was alone with his disciples in the house, they brought up the subject again. ¹¹ He told them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery against her. ¹² And if a woman divorces her husband and marries someone else, she commits adultery."

This is the logical conclusion to what Jesus has said about Divorce. His argument is that God is the one who has joined a husband and wife together as one. They therefore become one flesh and so, this is not something that can simply be set apart by humans. This means that powerful men should not simply treat women as chattels to be passed about. That's why the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy 24, even as it makes an allowance for hard hearts in permitting divorce puts restrictions in place to control it.

But if divorce is not meant to happen, then this means that the divorce certificate is invalid before God. The couple are still married and so, they are committing adultery, being unfaithful to their original husband/wife if they remarry again.

That would put a very strict rule in place. However, Matthew's account gives us a little bit more detail regarding Jesus' position. Matthew's report reads:

And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful

Mark is quite strict in his use of space, and so he doesn't give us every detail. As I mentioned previously, I don't think that his aim is to give us chapter and verse on divorce case law. Rather, he simply wants to draw the point that people who are legalistic end up putting up barriers to others even as they, themselves are breaking God's Law.

Matthew has a bit more space and so introduces an exception clause where the wife has committed "porneia" -sexual immorality or unfaithfulness. It is worth observing further that the exception

¹⁶³ Mark 10:1-9.

although focused on husbands here because they are the ones being addressed works two ways and applies to both wives and husbands.

Additionally, I believe that wrapped up in that concept of “unfaithfulness” are a number of ways in which it is possible to be unfaithful and so break the marriage covenant. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 talks about husbands who desert their wives and the OT Law also raises the possibility of neglect being covered. Unfaithfulness can include failure to maintain the covenant responsibilities in marriage and seeking pleasure and gratification through abuse of the relationship rather than through the appropriate means within the marriage covenant.

So, whilst,¹⁶⁴ there are different views among Christians about if and when divorce and remarriage are permissible, my understanding of Scripture is that divorce should be rare. However, there are specific situations where a husband or wife may be set free to divorce and remarry again.

I think the reasoning can be summed up as follows. First, that the one who causes the divorce is guilty of breaking the marriage covenant. Even if they are not the one who takes legal action to formalise the divorce, they have in effect done so in practice. Secondly, that the purpose of divorce is to set the person completely free. It is reasonable then that the innocent party should be completely free to move on with their life. Thirdly, that the proper consequence for breaking the OT Law had been the death penalty. We might conclude, in line with Romans 7, that the one guilty of unfaithfulness is in a technical sense, legally dead with regards to the marriage and therefore has no claim on the relationship. The innocent party is truly free to begin again without guilt, shame or fear.

24.6 Read Luke 16:19-31

Jesus tells a parable about two people. There's an unnamed, wealthy man and a beggar named Lazarus who sits at his gate. One gets the impression that the rich man shows little interest in or concern for Lazarus. The beggar is in a pitiful state. Echoing the description of the lost son in Luke 15, he is described as “longing to eat” but this time it is the rich man's food (v19-20).

The two men die and the rich man finds himself in Hades. He is in torment. He looks and sees Abraham, a long way off. Lazarus is with him. The rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus over to bring him comfort. Abraham says that this is not possible. First, Lazarus had suffered in life and so was now receiving comfort. The rich man had enjoyed life and received his reward and comfort there. Secondly, it isn't practically possible because there is an uncrossable chasm that has been placed between them.

Failing in his first request, the rich man now asks if Lazarus can go and warn his family of the eternal judgement awaiting them. This too is turned down by Abraham. Sufficient warning has been given them in the Law and Prophets. The rich man argues that someone coming back from the dead might make a difference but Abraham insists that if the man's brothers won't listen to God's Word in the Law and Prophets then they are unlikely to believe in the sign of one returning from the dead.

24.7 Hell, hades and Gehenna

We are perhaps not meant to think in terms of “Heaven and Hell” in the kind of way that these have been envisaged through much of church history. It's important of course to distinguish the wider doctrinal teaching of Scripture on those topics from how Jesus might employ terms and images in a

¹⁶⁴ Matthew 19:9.

way that his immediate audience would understand them. However, the primary purpose of these verses is not to introduce us to the topic of Hell.

The rich man is in torment. The Greek Word Hades tends to be used to describe what Jews would have referred to Sheol. It's the place of the dead, generally regardless of the life they have lived and their final destination. In that sense I think it is reasonable to assume that Lazarus, Abraham and the rich man are all pictured in Sheol/Hades. However, the chasm between the righteous and unrighteous demonstrates that there is a difference between them. Lazarus is experiencing comfort and blessing. He is with Abraham indicating vindication or justification, he is part of God's covenant people. the rich man is excluded from Abraham's presence and so banished from God's covenant people after death. Notice that this develops Jesus' earlier point, he has failed to use his worldly wealth to cultivate eternal friendships. He now experiences curse and judgement through torment and he must face this alone without comfort. Although the word is not used here, the concept of a place of specific torment was present in Jewish thought and the word Gehenna used to refer to it.

24. 8 Lost sons, shrewd stewards and loved beggars -common themes across the parables

One of the fascinating things that stands out as we read the parables of Jesus is to see the literary themes that link them together. As well as linking back to the stories about a lost sheep and a lost coin, the parable of the prodigal son links forward to the two parables in Luke 16.

First, the prodigal son is seen to be irresponsible with the wealth entrusted to him, he wastes it. However, unlike the shrewd steward who is also questionable in his handling of the resources given to him, it seems that the son does not use what he has in order to invest in friendships that will be there when disaster comes.

Secondly, we can see comparisons and contrasts between the lost son and Lazarus. Both find themselves in a destitute position. The son has only pigs for company, the beggar, dogs. Both would not have been good companions for a ceremonially clean Jew. Lazarus, like the son finds himself longing for another's food. This does kind of imply that the rich man has all the social skills and morals of a pig!

The lost son is welcomed back into his Father's embrace and a feast is given in his honour. Lazarus is welcomed into Father Abraham's embrace at the eschatological feast. Meanwhile, like the older brother, the rich man is found at a distance, on the outside looking. Father Abraham has a conversation with him, just as the Father does with the older brother, though this one is less positive. The theme of a dead son brought to life and an older brother who has a lifetime of enjoying the good things of the family estate do relate well to the point that Lazarus has suffered want, he has in effect been in the place of death on the outside and the rich man has had the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of a good life.

Some commentators have legitimately associated the older brother with the Jewish religious leaders and their attitudes to the sinners and outcasts that Jesus associates his time with. So, it is reasonable too, in my opinion to see parallels with the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man can be seen to represent those prosperous, hypocritical leaders whilst Lazarus is on the outside with the tax collectors, publicans and of course Gentiles. This makes it all the more poignant to notice that the rich man and his kin have had full access to the Law and Prophets but missed the message.

Jesus comes, as much to take Lazarus' place as that of the prodigal, to become poor and an outcast so that the beggars and outcasts of this life can be raised up to the joy of eternal life and blessings in him. They can enjoy Abraham's embrace marking them out as the true covenant people of God.

24.8 There must be more than this

The two stories that top and tail Luke 16 offer a stark contrast. The steward is aware that a day of reckoning is coming and he risks exile, isolation and destitution. He invests the wealth and power at his disposal now for long term benefit. The rich man fails to do this, he enjoys the material goods of life selfishly with no thought to others and no thought about his longer term, in fact his eternal destiny.

These two parables inform the teaching in the middle of the chapter. How are we to live life now? We are to live wisely. True wisdom means being alert to the bigger picture of eternity. This will affect how we use the good things given to us. Will we steward them will in the light of God's Word?

25 Mustard

The image of someone with only a small amount of faith, comparable to the size of a tiny seed being able accomplish great things whether the casting of a tree as in Luke 17, mountain (Mark 11:22) or both (Matthew 17:20), is an evocative one. It is central to Jesus' teaching about faith in Luke 17.

25.1 Read Luke 17:1-10

Jesus acknowledges that we live in a world where testing, or temptation are unavoidable. The Fall means that we will constantly face trials and suffering. These trials become temptations when they tempt us to seek identity, security and/or comfort above all else and not from God. Whilst temptation is unavoidable, this doesn't remove the responsibility of those who cause it. Whether Jesus is referring here to those who cause others to suffer or those who encourage them into sinful responses to trials through wrong advice is not stated. Perhaps it doesn't matter, both are causes of temptation.¹⁶⁵ Jesus uses hyperbolic language to describe the seriousness of this, especially when "little ones" or those young in faith and vulnerable are put at risk. It would be better to have them removed so completely from the scene that there is no chance of them coming back to cause further damage (v1-2).¹⁶⁶

Jesus' remedy to this is to "watch yourself". That we should keep a careful watch on our own thoughts and actions seems obvious both in terms of guarding ourselves from unavoidable temptation and ensuring that we are not the cause of others stumbling. However, the way that Jesus tells his disciples to watch or guard themselves may not seem so obvious. Jesus says first that we are to guard ourselves by rebuking our brother if he sins and secondly we are to continuously forgive them when they sin against us (v3-4).

Why is this the remedy? I would suggest three reasons. First, I think the point is that we can either respond to their sin against us by being tempted ourselves so that we too fall into sin by seeking to retaliate. Instead, we are to challenge directly the sin, to warn them whilst guarding against temptation by having a forgiving disposition.¹⁶⁷ Second, it contrasts the kind of person who seeks to tempt and provoke his brother with one who goes beyond abstaining from tempting to positively seeking to care for his brother's spiritual well-being. Thirdly, it reminds us that there is a collective dimension to this. We watch ourselves by watching each other but not in a judgemental manner.

The 12 apostles see this as a challenging requirement. How are they to consistently and perfectly forgive. They ask for more faith for this, a commendable desire. However, Jesus' response is that they don't need their faith increasing because with even a small, fragile faith, they can do big things (v6). We often take the description of "faith the size of a mustard seed" to show that it isn't the size of our faith that matters but rather the one we have faith in. The point is true and may be the

¹⁶⁵ Bock places the emphasis on false teachers here. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1388.

¹⁶⁶ Matthew includes a similar warning at Matthew 18:6. Matthew 18 seems to parallel Luke 17 and is perhaps picking up on the same teaching occasion with additional material. Matthew adds in the point that it is better to lose limbs than be cast into Gehenna. In the following section (18:15-20), Jesus expands on how to respond to the brother who sins against you.

¹⁶⁷ It may well be the description of being sinned against and forgiven seven times in a day is what prompts Peter's question about how many times he is meant to forgive ("Wow am I meant to forgive 7 times) and Jesus' response More than that Peter, you don't give up forgiving at the end of that bad day, even if they keep up that level of wronging you and letting you down for the next 70 days, you are still to forgive them (Matthew 18:21-22).

application in other contexts but this doesn't seem to be the one Jesus is making here. Rather, his parable of the servant coming in from work on the farm and being given further duties suggests that although these things seem great and impossible, they are in fact the reasonable duty of a believer. The sense could even be "I'm not really asking too much of you. I'm not asking you to move objects into the sea with your mind! If so, then God will equip us with the amount of faith we need (v7-10).

25.2 Read Luke 17:11-17

On the way, Jesus encounters a group of ten lepers. Leprosy was both a contagious disease and identified by the Law as rendering you unclean. 5, lepers were outcasts from normal society. They call out to Jesus, begging him to pity them (v11-13). Jesus tells them to go to show themselves to the priest. This was the Law's requirement; the priest could validate if a person was cured and declare them clean. They set off and, on the way, the miracle happens, they are healed. We see here that faith involves an obedient response to Jesus. They trust him to heal them and so they set off, responding as he has instructed (v13-14).

However, one of the ten, a Samaritan comes back to say thank you. Jesus observes that only one has done this "where are the other nine", not only that but it is the one who is a foreigner, not part of God's people who has returned to praise God. Note the link between thanking Jesus and praising God (v15-16). Jesus affirms that it is this man's faith, confirmed not just be following Jesus' instruction but his expressed gratitude to God which has healed him (v17-19).

25.3 Read Luke 17:18-37

Some Pharisees approach Jesus and ask him when God's kingdom will be inaugurated. This is another way of asking about when the Messiah will come which is kind of ironic given that he was standing right in front of them. Jesus says that the kingdom is now found by observation, in other words "one need not hunt for the kingdom.¹⁶⁸ This may partly point to the fact that this is not a political/physical/geographical kingdom. This would take a common reading of "entos" to mean "within you", so that God's kingdom is in the people's hearts. This however would struggle with a context where Jesus is addressing the Pharisees who very clearly did not have God's kingdom inside of them.¹⁶⁹ Some have also suggested that Jesus is referring to "legal observation", to keeping the Law. However, this does not seem to fit the context where no legal controversy is suggested¹⁷⁰. Most likely, the point is that the Pharisees did not need to be looking for cosmic signs. God's kingdom was already present, in their midst in the person of Jesus (v20-21).¹⁷¹ Nolland further suggests that the unobservable kingdom was the one that came without warning "it's right here" and so could not be prepared for.¹⁷²

The focus of the kingdom is on the king himself is a real, physical person, the son of man. Jesus tells his disciples that soon he will not be with them. They will long for his presence, to be able to hear his teaching and witness his miracles but he will not be there.¹⁷³ There will be people who claim to have seen him but they are not to pay attention to them. This is because when the Messiah is revealed, it will be like lightening, lighting up the whole sky, it will be obvious and unmissable to all. However, before that can happen, he must first suffer and be rejected (v22-25).

¹⁶⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1414.

¹⁶⁹ See Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 853.

¹⁷⁰ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1413.

¹⁷¹ See Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1413014.

¹⁷² Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 854.

¹⁷³ The phrase "days of the son of man" is unique to this passage. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1428.

Jesus offers two comparisons, the day of the Son of Man will be like Lot's and Noah's time. People will be complacently going about their business unexpectant and unready for what is to come (v26-29). In the same way, the Son of Man's Day will be sudden, unexpected and bring judgement. The imagery here is of an invading army bringing destruction. When that happens, your priority is to flee to safety, even leaving behind the things that you consider your life, your property and possessions in order to save what really matters your physical life because for everyone who survived and gets to safety one will be taken, either capture or killed (v26-35).¹⁷⁴

The Pharisees ask "when" and the disciples "where". The morbid imagery of a battlefield scene and vultures seeking dead bodies simply reinforces the point that the arrival of Christ's kingdom will be just as visibly obvious as the aftermath of death marked by the presence of carrion hovering above (v36-37).¹⁷⁵

The attitude we should have towards the day Jesus is talking about should be the same as those who flee, to seek safety and salvation first before all else.

25.4 What is the time/event that Jesus is talking about?

There have been two approaches when looking at this passage and similar ones in the Gospels, particular the discussion that follows Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Temple.¹⁷⁶ Matthew includes the description found here in Luke of two men and two women with one each taken and one left behind as part of the Matthew 24 discourse on the destruction of the Temple.¹⁷⁷ He also incorporates the warning about false sightings of the Messiah in that section.¹⁷⁸

On the one hand, there are those who see these prophesies as all referring to the last day, to Jesus' return. This has at times been accompanied by an interpretation of the description of the two pairs of people with one taken and one left behind as a description of what has become known as "The Rapture." This is the belief that at some point in the end times, God's people, the church will be raptured, or taken up to heaven to be with Jesus. In some end times systems, especially dispensationalism, the belief is that there will be a period of time when those "left behind" continue to live on, facing a great tribulation and the rise of the Anti-Christ before Jesus finally returns as judge and king.

It is worth noting that the language of Matthew 24:40 and Luke 17:16-37 does not naturally fit with Rapture imagery. Rather, it is the imagery seems more fitting with a sudden military raid. So, the person looking from his roof top is to flee quickly without pausing to rescue his possessions. In such a scenario, it would surely be the one left who are safe, those taken are not caught up into the sky. Rather, they are either captures as prisoners of war or killed.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Lot's wife is a notable example. When warned to flee Sodom, she turned back for a last glance and was caught in the apocalyptic event so that all remaining was a pillar of salt.

¹⁷⁵ Green, *Luke*, 636.

¹⁷⁶ Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21.

¹⁷⁷ Matthew 24:39-40.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew 24:26-27.

¹⁷⁹ Contra Morris, Luke 279. I'm surprised to see that a few commentators seem to stick with rapture imagery even if not dispensationalist in their theology. Morris seems to do so by linking the passage to 1 Thessalonians 4:17 where the followers of Jesus, both dead and alive are caught up to meet him. This is also used as a Rapture proof text but in fact, the imagery there is more of Christ's people coming out to meet their returning king and then accompanying him. So Paul is making a different point to Jesus here and I'm not convinced by the linking or conclusion.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that the things described by Jesus in these passages refer to events much closer to his life, death and resurrection. Is Jesus talking solely about the destruction of the Temple in AD70. Or is he even using the imagery of the future physical destruction of the Temple to point to the immediate near future and his own death and resurrection.

That Jesus describes a period of time when the disciples will long for one of his days suggests that we are meant to be expecting a future event. That there will be no question marks as with the rumours and speculation he warns about also rules out the AD70 interpretation. The best fit interpretation is that Jesus is pointing to his own coming Messianic reign when he returns.

Another linked discussion has been concerning what Jesus meant when he talked about God's kingdom coming. Did it come with him or was it merely near with its arrival in the future. This passage points to a view where the kingdom "comes in stages",¹⁸⁰ it is "already-not-yet".¹⁸¹ There was a sense in which the kingdom had arrived with Jesus' incarnation but at that stage, the world was still subject to the reign of sin and death. There is a deeper and greater coming with Jesus' death and resurrection which defeats the false ruler. The coming of the Spirit means that God's kingdom is present in the Church and the lives of believers. We work for the extension of his kingdom influence. There is however a future and further sense in which his kingdom finally and fully comes with his physical return.

25.5 Faith

The theme that runs through this section is true faith. We need faith in order to be able to obey Christ by living together as faithful believers who look out for one another, warn and encourage each other and forgive each other rather than harming one another, causing suffering and leading into temptation.

It's faith which enables us to find salvation. There is a strong relationship between the idea of being healed and being saved (the same Greek word is at times used for both) in Luke's Gospel and here the point of healing lepers is so that they will be clean and so reconciled into God's people. Faith is put into action both in obedience to Christ's word and in joyful, grateful praise for his salvation.

It is faith that will enable us to persevere whilst Christ is not physically present with us. This faith enables us to ignore false and premature announcements of his return. This faith will give us hope for the day when he does come back because we know that we are safe in him. In other words, this is all about persevering faith in The Now and Not Yet. This is faith to obey, faith to rejoice and faith to hope.

¹⁸⁰ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1418.

¹⁸¹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1418.

26 More Faith

We are focusing more and more on the final journey into Jerusalem. Jesus will have joined the pilgrimage with those going up to the festival. This gave further opportunity for miracles, teaching and of course engagement with enquirers and opponents.

The section begins with two parables that are unique to Luke, the parable of the persistent widow and the parable of the pharisee and tax collector. The encounter with the rich young ruler is told in all three of the synoptic Gospels.¹⁸² Luke does not explicitly refer to him as young but Matthew does indicate a young man. The different Gospels pick up on Jesus pronouncements of his coming death. They all describe an encounter with a blind man in Jericho but note the various.¹⁸³ The description of Jesus meeting Zacchaeus is unique to Luke. The parable of the ten pounds bears similarities to Matthew's parable of the talents.¹⁸⁴

26.1 Read Luke 18:1-8

Jesus tells another parable. Helpfully, Luke signposts at the start its purpose. It's about persistence in prayer (v1). The story is about an unjust judge who did not care about God or people. A widow keeps coming to plead with him to hear her case and vindicate her (v2-3). He has no interest in doing so, no doubt there was nothing for him to gain by helping a poor widow out who was unable either to bribe him or help him to grow in influence. However, not because he cares about God, people or justice but simply because he wants some peace and quiet, he eventually agrees to resolve her case (v4-5).

Jesus invites us to pay attention to the judge's response. If this judge was willing to settle the case eventually, we can trust God to hear and answer our prayers and specifically our prayers for justice. This is not because God is like the judge and so we need to persist in nagging him. Rather, the rhetorical question "will he keep putting them off?" invites the answer "no." God will want to answer our prayers quickly. (v6=8a)

Jesus finishes his teaching with the question "but when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth." This suggests that he is pointing us towards vindication on the final day, on judgement day. We should not think that because we are still waiting Christ's return that he is putting us off. Rather, we know that he will come at just the right time and this should encourage us in faithful prayer now (v8b).

26.2 Read Luke 18:9-14

The next parable is addressed to the self-righteous and proud, those who consider themselves better than others (v9). Two men go to pray at the temple. One is a pharisee, the other a tax collector (v10). The Pharisee stands up where he can be seen. He thanks God that he is not like other people, especially the tax collector, he does not sin but instead keeps the Law (v11-12).

The tax collector stays back at a distance, suggesting he doesn't want to be seen and heard, indicating a reticence. He cannot even look up. He simply recognises his sin and asks God for mercy (v13)

¹⁸² Matthew 19:16-26 and Mark 10:17-27.

¹⁸³ See below.

¹⁸⁴ Matthew 25:14-30.

Jesus says that it is the second man, the text collector who is justified, who goes away right with God. He adds an important Biblical theme that the proud who exalt themselves are humbled whilst God raises up and exalts the humble (v14).

26.3 Justification

One of the foundations of the Reformation was an emphasis on “Justification by faith.” This is the belief that we are made right with God, not through our own works but rather we receive Christ’s righteousness. Jesus was perfectly obedient in life and death and so, we talk about his obedience being imputed to us. In Romans 4:1-8, Paul uses the image of his righteousness being credited to our account.

In the 20th Century, an argument developed that we had completely misunderstood justification since the Reformation because we had misunderstood what the Jews of Jesus’ and Paul’s day believed. It’s sometimes referred to as “The New Perspective on Paul” but may be better described as “new perspectives on Palestinian Judaism.” Scholars observed that a number of Jewish texts emphasised that Jews already were in God’s kingdom and so right with God through the covenant. They were required to keep the law in order to stay in the covenant. This theme became known as covenant nomism. The argument was that the Jews did not believe in works righteousness but rather in a form of ethnic righteousness. They weren’t legalistic but they did put too much emphasis on their national identity in a way that excluded Gentiles.

Whilst it is fair to say that this idea of election and grace through the covenant was certainly present in Jewish thinking, Jesus’ parable here challenges the view that it was only about ethnic righteousness. The parable also counters another assertion that the Jesus of the Gospels and Paul were preaching essentially different messages, that it was Paul who developed the idea of justification by faith in order to accommodate Gentile converts.

Whilst the Pharisee’s pride cannot be disconnected from his ethnic identity, not just as a true Israelite but as a uniquely faith one who has not compromised, it is also clear that there is a legalistic pride. In fact, the point is that his righteousness is about self-righteousness which is wrapped up in who he is and what he does. By contrast, the tax-collector realises that he deserves nothing and so throws himself on God’s mercy alone. Notice too that faith is not measured in terms of confidence. It is not the quality of his faith that justifies him but the direction of his faith, that it is in God and not in himself.

26.4 Read Luke 18:15-17

Parents were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed. The disciples objected presumably thinking that this was a distraction from the important business of healing, exorcism and preaching (v15). Jesus insists though that he wants to see the children and his disciples are not to prevent them from coming to him (v16). He then uses little children as an example of exactly those kinds of people who are welcomed into the kingdom. This is not about childhood innocence or perhaps even to do with trust but rather a reminder that the kingdom belongs to those who are considered least in this world (v17).

26.5 Read Luke 18:18-30

Jesus is approached by someone described as a ruler, probably indicating that he was one of the synagogue elder¹⁸⁵ who asks him “what must I do to receive eternal life.” As has been observed

¹⁸⁵ See Green, *Luke*, 665.

many times over, this is probably not a question along the lines of how do I get to go to heaven and die. Rather, it is to do with citizenship in God's kingdom. This does involve life after death and the expectation of resurrection but is more than that (v18).¹⁸⁶

Before answering the question, Jesus picks up on one seemingly small detail, "why do you call me good?" This focus on one tiny detail in the man's attempt at polite address may surprise us but Jesus is intentional in his response, pushing the man to think about what is good and who is good. "Only God is good" says Jesus which may start to prompt questions about Jesus' identity if he is good. However, Jesus' aim here is perhaps more about giving the man a clue about how to answer the next bit (v19).

Jesus then reminds the man of God's commandments in the Torah. The man insists he has kept them all which suggests that he hasn't been paying attention when Jesus claimed that no one except God is good (v20-21). He shouldn't be surprised then to hear Jesus tell him that he isn't perfect, he is lacking in one crucial area. Jesus tells him to part with his possessions, selling them and giving everything to the poor. This will give him treasure in a better place, heaven, Then Jesus invites the man to follow him (v22). He is wealthy and simply cannot accept the command to give up his possessions for Jesus. He goes away sad. Often the focus of discussion is on his wealth however, the primary issue here seems to be that he isn't ready to follow Jesus (v23)

Jesus then comments that it easier for camels to fit through needle eyes than rich men to get into God's kingdom, their wealth and desire proves too much of an obstacle. Whilst there has been much speculation about a possible gate into Jerusalem which was small and known as the needle where those travelling in on camels had to dismount, I suspect that Jesus is intentionally presenting an extreme and ridiculous situation (v24-25)

Wealthy people were often seen as blessed, rewarded for their righteousness. The question is asked "can anyone get in", it seems like the barriers are too high. Jesus responds that it is God alone who makes things possible for all (v26-27). Meanwhile Peter is keen to impress on Jesus that the disciples have given up everything. Jesus reassures him that no matter what they have given up, the rewards of the kingdom are far better (v28-30).

26.7 Read Luke 18:31-34

One of the markers of Jesus' progress to Jerusalem in the Gospels is that on three occasions he predicts his death. Here, Luke records the third prediction. Three pronouncements will indicate emphatic completeness. Jesus' prediction wasn't a throw away comment, it was to be taken seriously. This prediction was central to the Gospel accounts.

Jesus takes his disciples aside, this is a message for their ears only. He tells them that they are going to Jerusalem and there, not only that he will die but the manner of his death. He will be betrayed into the hands of Gentiles who will mock, insult and flog him. They will kill him but he will rise again "on the third day." Note that this expression "the third day" is different to saying "three days later" (v31-33)

The disciples are unable to understand what Jesus is saying. Whether this is because they are not ready to consider him dying, that they are shocked at the Gentiles/Romans being given power to do so or that the idea of Jesus' resurrection is too much to grasp isn't said (v34)

¹⁸⁶ See Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 216.

26.8 Read Luke 18:35-43

Jesus arrives at Jericho. A blind beggar begins crying out, recognising Jesus as a descendant, and by implication, the heir of David, he begs for mercy (v35-38).¹⁸⁷ Those in front of Jesus try to silence him, to make sure he doesn't bother Jesus, echoing the disciples attempts to turn away the children. Again, echoing his response to the disciples, Jesus insists that the blind man is brought to him (v39-40). Jesus asks him what he wants and the man responds by saying that he wants to receive his sight. Jesus heals him and immediately the man follows him (v41-43),

26.9 Read Luke 19:1-10

Whilst passing through Jericho, Jesus encounters another man who people would not have thought he should be bothered with. Zacchaeus, was not only a tax collector but "a chief tax collector" suggesting that he would have been high up in the chain, farming out or selling taxation rights to others. This would have enabled him to set his own cut at whatever he wanted. He has therefore become wealthy.

He was short in stature and so to get a vantage point over the crowd, he climbed up a tree, presumably hoping to observe without himself being seen (v1-4). However, when Jesus reaches the tree, he stops, addresses Zacchaeus and tells him to come down. Jesus intends to visit Zacheus and receive hospitality from him (v5-6). This causes grumbling among the crowd because tax-collectors were considered to be traitors and sinners (v7).

We are not told what went on in the exchange between Jesus and the tax collector but it produced repentance. Zacchaeus announces willingness to pay back with significant compensation those he has defrauded and to give half of his possessions to the poor (v8)

Notice the comparison and contrast with the rich young ruler. Zacheus is not required to give up his wealth by Jesus, yet he volunteers to give a significant amount of it away himself. That he doesn't give up everything, although his wealth would have been seriously diminished suggests that there isn't a binding requirement on rich people to give up everything. However, Zacheus' response indicates a changed heart towards riches.

Jesus announces that salvation has come to Zacheus' house. His mission was to "seek and save the lost". Tax collectors are included in "the lost" as those Jesus came for (v9).

26.10 Read Luke 19:11-127

Whilst there, Jesus tells a parable. Luke says that it is in response to those expecting him to become king immediately. However, the story also seems to respond to the potential objections people would have had to Zacheus.

In the story, a nobleman heads off to another country to be appointed king. This was of course how the Herodian family had received their positions as appointees of Rome. He leaves his servants to look after his estate and splits allocates some of his capital evenly among ten of them to trade(v11-13).¹⁸⁸

Rather than accepting him as king, the people petition and protest against him to no avail. He returns as king (v14) Some of his servants have invested the wealth given to them leading to returns of 5 or

¹⁸⁷ He is named as Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46, although this simply means son of Timaeus and we may still be left without a first name for him.

¹⁸⁸ Green, *Luke*, 678.

10 times the amount. He rewards them. They have looked after his private and personal estate so now he entrusts them with parts of the kingdom, 5 cities and 10 cities)v15-19).

One servant however has failed to invest. He returns the money at exactly the same value. With the excuse that he knew the master to be harsh. The king tells him that he could at least have stuck it in the bank to make some interest. In context, we can see his move as political, joining with the protestors.

The master orders that this servants' money is taken from him and given to the first servant. Those who resisted and protested are put to death. Jesus introduces here the proverb that those with much will receive more whilst those with nothing will even have that taken away from them (v22-27).

26.11 Jericho

The blind beggar is left unnamed in Luke 18 but introduced by his surname and Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46. Matthew tells us about two blind men rather than one. Only Luke records the encounter with Zacchaeus. There is another difference in accounts too. Is Jesus approaching (Luke) or leaving the city) Matthew and Mark)?

There are a couple of possible explanations here. One suggestion made by a few commentators is that there were two parts to Jericho, the old city and the new city. It would be possible therefore to refer to Jesus as leaving the old city to enter the new city. Others suggest that we should not worry too much about technical exactitude. All the accounts emphasise that Jesus was passing through. It is possible that Luke intends to draw our attention to the encounter with Zachaeus and build to that incident so intentionally pulls the healing of the blind man to the start of his Jericho account. The blind man may have heard about Jesus entering the city and this would not preclude him from responding to Jesus as the Lord left the city having met Zacchaeus. The two blind men may have been present together with Mark and Luke focusing on one of them or it may be also that Matthew has brought two incidents, one as Jesus entered the city and one as he left together.¹⁸⁹

26.12 Talents and pounds

The parable Jesus tells in Jericho is similar to the parable of the talents. However, there are differences. This may suggest that this was a story Jesus told on more than one occasion with intentional variations. In Luke 19, the reason for the master's journey is made explicit drawing parables to Herod the Great. The servants receive an equal amount rather than beign differentiated between based on ability. Finally, the reward in Matthew 25 is that the servants are entrusted with more talents. However, in Luker 19, the master's own step up in responsibility from noble to king is reflected in the step up given to the servants who move from stewarding his personal wealth to stewarding the cities of his kingdom.

Luke says that the parable was directed at those who expected Jesus' kingdom to come quickly. The point was that there would be a period when Jesus would be away from his people before returning with full kingly authority. Zachaeus responds with the new faith given him to his immediate personal circumstances. He will no longer acquire for himself but will invest for the kingdom. This is what we are meant to do while we wait for Jesus too. This means investing in the responsibilities we are given now as part of God's people with a view to the time to come when Christ returns where we will have greater blessing and greater responsibility in the coming kingdom.

¹⁸⁹ Bock offers a helpful summary, Bock, Luke 9:51-21:53, 1502-1504.

26.13 What do you have faith for?

The parable of the minas is the fitting culmination to a section on faith. We need faith to be right with God. True faith means that like Zachaeus and unlike the rich young ruler we do not need to depend on this world's resources but in Christ alone. We can trust God to call upon Christ despite the barriers that some might try to put in the way. Faith gives us hope as we look for Christ's return as king and so we can invest our resources, time, gifts for God's glory as we look forward to life in the coming kingdom.

27 Jerusalem

I'm dropped off on Sunbridge Road, a little walk away from my destination. As I start walking, I see others who have parked their cars on one of the side streets. More join our procession as we get closer. Then we get onto Manningham Lane to be met by a much larger crowd still. It's a sea of claret and amber with carves and flags waving. The larger crowd have come up from the bus station in the city centre. We meet similar crowds coming from other directions. Eventually we arrive at Valley Parade where we are greeted by people selling flags, carves, programmes and other souvenirs. It's the final day of the season and the crowds are coming to hopefully see Bradford City get promoted. If you've experienced such a moment then you might have got just a small insight into what it would have been like for the pilgrims travelling up to Jerusalem, coming together from different locations, gradually joining together with other groups to form a larger crowd.

27.1 Read Luke 19:28-40

Jesus gets closer and closer to Jerusalem. The disciples arrive at a place called "The Mount of Olives", part of a range of mountains across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem.¹⁹⁰ This developed significance later when Jesus ascended from there. They are also close to Bethpage and Bethany where Mary, Martha and Lazarus were from and which would become Jesus' base for the Passover Festival period (v28-29).

Jesus sends a couple of disciples on an errand to find and untie a colt to bring back to him. If challenged, they are to say that "The Lord has need." This could have been an example of prophecy and special divine authority but the wording here, as with the preparation for the Passover meal seems to suggest more simply that this was a prearranged agreement. There is significance to the point that the colt has not yet been ridden. You might expect it to resist and take time to train v30-31). They go to find the colt and things happen just as Jesus had said (v32-34).

When they bring the colt back to Jesus, those with him put their cloaks over the colt so he can ride on it. Then they spread their coats on the road, like a red carpet, They cannot literally repair the king's highway and level it up in time but they can quickly and symbolically represent that this has been done. They also begin to sing praises and to wave branches. Notice that whilst much imagery focuses on Jesus entering within the walls of Jerusalem, the Gospels focus on Jesus' descent from the Mount of Olives. Notice too that this then is not a welcoming crowd from Jerusalem but rather it is the pilgrims who have come with Jesus and will include the likes of Bartimaeus (v35-37).

The words they sing praise Jesus, declaring him to be blessed by God and announcing him to be the King. They also praise God, declaring his glory (v38). This annoys some of the Pharisees in the crowd. They demand that Jesus rebukes his followers but he refuses. He argues that his praise cannot be silenced. If the people stop singing, then creation itself, even inanimate objects like stones will call out. Whilst the praises already sung could be said of a merely human king, Jesus' claim that creation will praise him is a pointer to his divinity (v39-40).

27.2 Procession

All four Gospels describe the procession into Jerusalem. The synoptic Gospels seem to share a main source, probably Marks' Gospel with no major deviations. Matthew however adds in a further piece

¹⁹⁰ Bock, Luke 9:51-24:53, 1552.

of commentary not present in Luke. He had a particular concern to show how Jesus fulfilled Scripture and so he quoted Zechariah 9:9.

“Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”^[a]

Note Matthew also goes on to insist that there are in fact two donkeys, the colt or foal and the older donkey, the mother.^[191] This has perplexed some commentators because it’s difficult to envision Jesus riding precariously balanced on cloaks spread across two beasts. However, given that it is the harder and unnecessary understanding of Zechariah, it seems to me that this is more likely to be an accurate representation of events. However, we may not need to think of Jesus literally riding both animals and this may simply emphasise that both were present. RT France suggests that the mother’s presence would reassure the unridden foal.^[192]

All the accounts make it explicitly clear that the procession begins outside Jerusalem though Luke gives the specific detail that the singing begins at the Mount of Olives. Matthew and Mark offer further detail about what was sing, specifically that Jesus was identified as a descendant of David.

John talks about crowds coming out to Jesus which may leave it ambiguous as to whether they had come from Jerusalem or had been pilgrims coming up to Jerusalem. That some at least are identified as those who were present for the raining of Lazarus suggests that they were those who had come as pilgrims with Jesus. However, it may be that some had arrived ahead of him and so came out to meet him.

27.3 Read Luke 19:41-44

As they get within sight of the city, Jesus weeps and speaks a lament over it. He says that he wished that the inhabitants could have seen where their source of peace was. God himself was meant to be Jerusalem’s protector but they had rejected him by rejecting his anointed one. This meant that the truth was hidden from them and so they were unable to seek peace from and in Jesus (v41-42). Now, they will suffer greatly, enemy armies will encircle and destroy the city. Jesus prophesies the horrific events of AD70. The image of no stones left standing is meant to be hyperbolic to give a sense of the extent of destruction (v43-44).

27.4 Read Luke 19: 45-48

The goal of Jesus’ procession into the city is the end of the pilgrimage at the Temple. There, just as he would have every year, Jesus finds money changers exchanging common currency for Temple money and others then trading sacrificial animals for the money. This would have made for both a noisy scene and an exploitative situation as those exchanging money and selling animals sought to make a profit. Of course, the idea was that you would bring your own animals up but these animals would have been pre-vetted to ensure they were acceptable. Luke focuses on those selling and tells us in terse language that Jesus drove them out (v45). He accuses them of turning God’s house which was meant to be for prayer into a “den of robbers.” In other words, they were preventing people from coming to God and instead exploiting them for their own benefit (v46).

^[191] Matthew 21:7.

^[192] RT France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (NICNT. Grand Rapids MI.: Eerdmans, 2007), 778.

Jesus engages publicly in teaching at the Temple. Meanwhile his enemies continue to plot against him but still cannot find a way to kill him (v47-48).

27.5 Jesus and his Father's house

The result of the commotion in the Temple will have been to put a pause on the events there. The disruption would have affected the ceremonial cleanliness of the animals. It is fascinating that Jesus leaves this act until his final visit to Jerusalem. John does place the Temple cleansing at the beginning of his Gospel and some have concluded that there were therefore two incidents. However, this event was highly provocative and would have played a part in motivating the leaders to move against Jesus. I therefore would presume that John's decision to place the event early is to do with stylistic and theological ordering, so that it frames his Gospel. Indeed, I am tempted to think of John as offering us a series of flashbacks from the perspective of that last week.¹⁹³

Jesus' decision to act now may have been pragmatic therefore, as he chose his timing but it would also reflect the parable about the landowner coming to inspect and review his tree and not finding fruit. Time is given but no change leads to judgement. Jesus' actions are not simply a purification or cleansing but an act of judgement bringing proceedings to a halt. We know from the other Gospels that those buying and the money changers were dealt with by Jesus as well.¹⁹⁴ The Temple, was meant to be for prayer to YHWH but those responsible for it had abused their position, exploiting or robbing the people. The quote from Isaiah 56:7 shows this not to be new problem but a longstanding charge against the religious leaders. Their rights and responsibilities are held forfeit.

An important image of Jesus is that he is the true and better temple because it is in the person of Jesus that God is present with his people and it is Jesus that we need to come to in order to worship and receive forgiveness and reconciliation. The pausing of the sacrificial system prior to Christ's death and resurrection is an important marker that time is up for that system. The old wineskin is not fit for the new wine.

¹⁹³ John 1:13-22.

¹⁹⁴ C.f. Morris, *Luke*, 300.

28 Challenged

Jesus' manner of arrival has put a cat amongst the pigeons. Ther authorities are increasingly determined to have him killed but also fear the crowds, so they seek ways to catch him out and either bring Roman justice or the wrath of the crowds against him.

28.1 Read Luke 20:1-8

Jesus spends his time during the festival in the temple courts. He is described as teaching and proclaiming or preaching good news. We are probably not meant to think of two different activities here as though there is a sharp distinction between teaching and preaching. This is not about stylistic choices. Rather, Jesus teaches the people God's word as a means to proclaim the good new of his kingdom (v1).

He is approached by representatives from the Jewish leaders, some from the chief priests and some of the scribes or law teachers. They engage in debate with him and demand to know the authority he has for his teaching (v2).

Jesus responds with a question. "What about John's authority? Where did that come from?"(v3-4) They are left speechless. They surely know that John's authority was from God but dare not answer. To deny it would both be wrong and would make them unpopular with the people. However, to acknowledge John's authority as from God would be to recognise Jesus' authority too (v-6)). They simply say "we don't know" (v7). Jesus says that he won't answer their question about him either. The point is that it is their moral weakness rather than intellectual incapability which puts up a barrier to them knowing the truth (v8).

28.2 Read Luke 20:9-19

Jesus tells another story. A man plants a vineyard and lets it out to farmers. . The arrangement seems to have been that they could enjoy the fruit of their labour in return for giving him a share. The time comes and the owner sends his slave to receive his share but instead the tenants beat him (v9-10). This happens three times (v11-12). So, eventually, the owner sends his beloved son, hoping they will respect him (v13). Instead, they kill the son, presuming foolishly that they will get to share his inheritance (v14-15).

Jesus asks what the owner will do, surely he will come to punish the rebellious tenants (v16a). For some reason, Jesus' interlocutors struggle to accept this (v16b). Jesus' response is to quote Scripture, specifically the words that describe the rejected stone which has become the corner stone (v17-18). The parable is clearly telling the story of Israel figuratively. The tenants represent the Jewish leaders and the slaves who are killed, the prophets. Jesus is the son sent by his father. The authorities are now determined to kill Jesus and so increasingly look for a pretext to do so. We will continue to see how some of those attempts play out.

28.3 Read Luke 20:20-26

The way that the authorities seek a pretext to arrest Jesus is to send people to try and catch him out by pretending to ask sincere questions. Luke however identifies them as spies, those coming with a hidden agenda, pretending to be something that they are not (v20).

Jesus sees through their game. So, when they ask him whether or not they should pay tax to Caesar, he immediately sees through the trap. If he says “yes”, he will make himself unpopular with the people, if he says “no”, he will be in trouble with the Roman authorities for sedition (v21-23).

Jesus gets them to bring him a coin and to acknowledge that it is marked with an image of Caesar. Every day, they trade under Caesars authority. They owe their day to day lives to him and already acknowledge that in their compliance. So, Jesus says to them that they should give the emperor what belongs to him. The sense might well be “why are you trying to hold onto the pagan money of your oppressors?” Or, “Better get rid of the stuff.”¹⁹⁵ However, Jesus adds that they should give to the Lord what belongs to him. There is the challenge, don’t they in fact owe everything to the one true God (v24-25). Jesus’ authority silences their questions. They are unable to catch him out (v26).

28.4 Two Kingdoms

This parable is sometimes used as the basis for an approach to Public Theology referred to as “Two Kingdom Theology.” Under this approach, two spheres of influence or rule are envisaged. On the one hand, you have God’s Kingdom and on the other, you have secular, worldly authority. The two are seen as having nothing to do with each other and therefore Christians should not seek to engage with political matters. However, that isn’t what Jesus is saying here. The point about rendering to Ceasar and God is that they have already obligated themselves to Caesar when they should recognise God as the true and rightful king of kings to whom all us due. As Tom Wright puts it:

“the challenge to Jerusalem, the Temple, its rulers and their hypocritical underlings, are all concentrated in the second half of the command. ‘Give God back what belongs to him.

Jesus’ own accusation against his contemporaries is that they have consistently failed to worship their true and living God.”¹⁹⁶

28.5 Whose image ... whose mark?

Early readers of Luke’s Gospel, perhaps in the late 60s/early 70s of the first century will have picked up on some important links and clues as they read about how Jesus answered the question about paying tax to Caesar. Most immediately was the link back to Palm Sunday. Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem and gone in to purify the temple, acclaimed at the heir of David by the crowd. He was being seen as the saviour king. The Jewish leaders were looking for a way to get rid of him but could not go up against a popular leader directly. So, they needed to involve Pilate and the Romans. The tax question looked like an obvious way to do this. Get Jesus to either recognise Caesar’s right to the tax and in so doing give up his popular appeal or insist that tax should not go to the oppressor and be guilty of treason.

When Jesus invites them to bring a coin and tell him whose image is on it, that echoes the declaration in Genesis 1:26-28 that we are made in God’s image. However, it might also have made early readers think of John’s description in Revelation of a beast exercising dominion and requiring all to have his mark to buy and sell. Early Christians did not need to look to an end times scenario for this. They already needed Caesar’s mark to trade. Note that the mark in Revelation was on the hand and forehead. This counters the requirement for God’s people to have his law on their heads and hands and signifies worldview and lifestyle, what we believe/think and what we do.

¹⁹⁵ Tom Wright, *Luke for everyone*, 241.

¹⁹⁶ Tom Wright, *Luke for everyone*, 242.

In truth, the religious leaders carried the mark or image of Caesar because they were sold out to him. They were looking to him to fix their little problem with Jesus, they ruled and served at his pleasure. They followed the sharp and ungodly practices of his world.

There is however another link or echo. In Ephesians 1:13, we are told that we are sealed with the Spirit. The martyrs in Revelation did not just refuse to bear the beast's mark. They bore the mark or the seal of the Spirit. So too do we. This means that we can be in the World but not of the World.

28.6 Read Luke 20:27-40

The Sadducees make another attempt to catch Jesus out with a complex theological and ethical case study. They imagine a scenario where a husband has died leaving his wife a widow. The Torah provided for something known as a levirate marriage where the husband's brother or close relation steps in to marry her and provide offspring for the deceased. So, supposing that not only does her original husband die but each of her brothers, whose wife will she be in the coming age?

Their aim seems to be to catch him out by setting an unanswerable theological conundrum but the problem was rooted in their own theology, the Sadducees did not believe in the general resurrection of the dead. It seems that their intent was to attack and disprove the idea of resurrection itself. Of course, Jesus was soon to deal with their theological problem in a full and decisive manner. Here, his response is to first argue that life will be different in the age to come, marriage is for this life here and now but in eternity we are not given and taken in marriage. Jesus gives a specific reason for this, it is because in eternity, we too will be eternal and will not die, just like the angels. It's important to observe here that Jesus is not saying that we will be like the angels in every respect. The focus is on the absence of death. This does place an emphasis on offspring as a central good of marriage, though I would see that in the wider remit of marriage arising in the context of mankind's mission to fill and subdue the earth.

We might observe that this does not treat marriage as a negative thing but rather is a natural consequence of New Testament eschatology. If we will enter our sabbath rest, then the need for a marriage "helper" to fulfil humanity's mission is no longer there.

Secondly, he takes them to the Torah. The Sadducees were scriptural minimalists, not accepting the prophets. However, Jesus insists that the Torah itself, one of the few parts of Scripture they accepted points to resurrection and eternal life. At the burning bush, God declares himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The suggestion is that this is intended to be taken as a present tense, rather than a historic identification. If he is their God and he is God of the living, then they too must be alive and worshipping him. In Matthew's Gospel, we see Jesus pushing the point even harder insisting that the Sadducees don't get it because they are ignorant both of God's Word and God's power.

28.7 The Sadducees

There were a number of sects and groupings within Judaism including the Pharisees, Essenes and Zealots. The Sadducees held significant influence among the ruling elite on the Sanhedrin. They accepted a restricted version of the Scriptures as inspired, primarily the books of the Law, hence Jesus focuses on the Torah when countering their beliefs with Scripture. They also were sceptical about the supernatural and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and that influences their questioning here. Unfortunately, we are dependent on hostile witnesses concerning them, including

Josephus, and that creates a challenge when seeking to build up a full and accurate picture of the sect.¹⁹⁷

28.9 Marriage, singleness and eschatology

When Jesus responds to the Sadducees conundrum and the Levirate marriage, he insists that in “the age to come”, there is no more giving and receiving in marriage. This may leave us with a few pastoral questions and implications.

First of all, there was the immediate pastoral implication for people in that context. Jesus’ point was that the Sadducees conundrum was a red herring. The levirate laws were designed to deal with the problem of death but in eternity, the enemy of death has gone. So at a minimum, the particular practice of having kinsmen standby to represent the deceased partner goes out the window. The whole point of levirate marriage was to provide the widow with security and status as well as to hopefully provide the deceased man, especially where he was the primary heir with descendants and heirs of his own. Of course, we do not have the same customs today but there is a reminder here more broadly, and taken up in Jesus’ comments about the burning bush, that we are in the business of life, not death and this should drive all aspects of our pastoral care.

Secondly, this is good news for single people. We can at times over hype the place of marriage. Remembering that marriage is good but for a finite time not eternal, getting that in perspective helps us to recognise the good and positive reasons for being single too. Paul saw his singleness as an opportunity to serve the Gospel, to keep his focus on the greater joy ahead. Single people in church help us to remember that our primary relationship and eternal relationship to one another

Thirdly, it is important to emphasise that the way in which Jesus says that we are like the angels is specifically that we will not die. This is important because sometimes people read into this that the likeness is in terms of us being spirits. However, note that if it was angelic beings that desired human women in Genesis 6, then their nature as spirits did not prevent either sexual desire or procreation. More importantly, Scripture is clear that we will experience a bodily resurrection. This protects us from a Gnostic type presumption that spirit is good and matter/physical bodies bad.

Fourth, there are pastoral implications for married people and widows. This may open up a lot of questions about how we will relate to one another in eternity. It’s important to emphasise that eternity will not undo or take away from the reality of our relationships here on earth. We will know each other and I’m sure there will be no diminishing in love for those we loved in the here and now, perhaps an increased capacity to love others to the same degree, the closer that we are to the infinite source of love. However, the relationship there will be different. Perhaps that should encourage believers to cultivate that eternal relationship now. These verses help to let widows and widowers know that they are free to remarry should they choose, though they are also under no compulsion. This should also help us to encourage a healthy attitude to life after bereavement. There is pain in the loss but life is not over, there are good things to look forward to in life. Furthermore, when a spouse goes ahead, this should not change our own longing and hope. Our first hope and longing is to see Christ not to be reunited with our loved one.

28.10 Read Luke 20:41-44

Jesus throws a question back to his interrogators. The Messiah was believed to be David’s heir but Psalm 110:1 suggests that David looked to the Messiah as his own lord and master. This must either

¹⁹⁷ JD Douglas (Ed), *New Bible Dictionary*, 1123-24.

mean that the Messiah was not a descendant of David (but that would mean going against the rest of Scripture), or something bigger was going on so that the Messiah could be both David's heir and Lord.

28.11 Read Luke 20:45—21:4

Jesus addresses his disciples but with the crowds overhearing. He warns them that the scribes, or teachers of the law might give an appearance of piety but they are not to be taken in, their true priority is their own advancement in status and wealth. They will stop at nothing to achieve it, even taking advantage of devout widows, exploiting them to defraud them of their property. They may have put on lengthy prayers but it was just for show (20:45-47).

It is no accident them that Luke follows these comments up with an account of Jesus in the temple, observing the wealthy make a show of bringing their offerings. These would have included some of those that Jesus warned about. They will have got their wealth through exploitation. Then a widow comes along who has presumably been so exploited leaving her with little. What she has, she gives, not just a part of but the full amount, all she has. Jesus says that she is the one who is blessed. The implication, if blessed is that she is one of the happy people of the Sermon on the Mount. She is vindicated or justified (21:1-4).

28.12 Jesus the effortless master

It's often assumed that Jesus' response to his interlocutors is to evade their traps by responding with questions to side step them. This risks making Jesus sound evasive. However, whilst he uses the technique of answering questions with more questions, a form of Socratic method, this is not to avoid direct and authoritative answers. And the answers are not to avoid controversy. Jesus is happy to be overheard critiquing and challenging his enemies' authority. His response to the question about taxes is an obvious rebuke to those who fain religious purity but are in fact already compromised. What we see is that both in his debating victory and in the content of his responses, Jesus establishes his authority. He is the one that David called Lord, he is "great David's greater son."

29 The time will come

Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Temple is one of the significant events from the last week of his earthly life and finds its way into all the Synoptic Gospels.¹⁹⁸ In fact, some have seen that as a crucial part of our ability to date the writing of the New Testament.¹⁹⁹ If these events had already been fulfilled by the time that the Gospels were written down, you would expect some observation to that effect but there is no mention. This suggests that we can date the Gospels and indeed much if not all of the New Testament prior to AD70. Much attention has been given to these passages over the years due to the link drawn between Jesus' short-term prophecy of the Temple's coming destruction and questions about the end times and his future return.

29.1 Read Luke 21:5-6

As Jesus leaves the Temple, some of his disciples are commenting on how impressive it looks. This was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The 2nd Temple had been built by returning exiles with Cyrus' the Great's permission and is reported in Ezra and post exilic prophetic literature such as Haggai. At the time, the temple had seemed pitifully unremarkable and small in comparison to King Solomon's temple. However, it had been much expanded and improved with outer courtyards for Gentiles, women and men by Herod the Great who saw this building project as a way to ingratiate himself to the Jews. Mark 13:1 tells us that it was one specific disciple who commented though they are left unnamed. Jesus seems unimpressed and responds that a time will come when "not one stone will be left on another" pointing to destruction. This prophecy was fulfilled in AD70 when the roman legions lay siege to Jerusalem and destroyed the city and temple. There is perhaps a figurative element to the wording, one wall, the Western of Wailing wall survives and remains to this day a place of pilgrimage (v5-6).

29.2 Read Luke 21:7-9

The other two Gospels inform us that the conversation is continued at the Mount of Olives but Luke simply records the discourse as a continuous conversation. Again, Maek provides added detail reporting that it was specifically Peter, Andrew, James and John who spoke further with Jesus. It was probably an ongoing discussion rather than one interrupted by the journey and picked up later. They want to find out when all of this is going to happen, will it be soon or far in the future. It seems that they associate such earth shattering news with the end times. (v7). Echoing earlier comments in Luke 17, Jesus says that there will lots of people coming and claiming to be his representatives or he himself but they will not be and they are to be ignored (v8). He also warns them of wars and trouble ahead but they are not to be alarmed by them or see them as immediate markers of the end (v9).

29.3 Small Christs

It strikes me that whilst we may occasionally hear of people claiming to be Christ himself, these are usually considered mentally ill, deranged in modern society. Some may be led astray into dangerous and abusive cults. However, generally speaking, these are not a risk to Christians. The greater risk is from those claiming in some way to represent Jesus but in fact promoting their own agenda. These often promise in various ways that if we do things their way then we will meet success, we will be individually prosperous and collectively successful. This is the undertone to contemporary

¹⁹⁸ See also Mark 13 and Matthew 24.

¹⁹⁹ On the dating of the Synoptic Gospels, see Bernier, *Rethinking the dates of the New Testament: The evidence for early composition* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2022), 35-86.

movements such as The New Apostolic Reformation with its dominion theology or Seven Mountain Mandate but it's also there in more conservative streams especially where there is a post-millennial-reconstructionism approach. I think this underpins much of what we see under the Christian Nationalism banner.

I remember at University that our Christian Union would be frequented by speakers who would announce that God was doing a new thing in our generation and we were going to be in the van guard of it, it was going to start in Sheffield. I don't know if they were particularly interested in the seven hills that Sheffield is meant to sit on or if they gave the same speech at every church and CU they visited. In any case, the reality is that some of us have gone on with the Lord and sadly some haven't. Some have seen fruit in chosen vocations including some in Gospel ministry. I'm not aware of any world changers that were amongst us.

I guess it would be easy for my generation to have been caught up in the hype and now disappointed. In the same way, you or I might experience crushing disappointment if we don't personally see breakthrough in our lives and it is possible for a generation to become cynical. I think we need to guard against both the extreme of naively being caught up in whatever nonsense comes along from puffed up people and the danger of dumping a bucket load of cynicism on today's generation. A healthier approach is to seek to encourage people to see what is happening from the perspective Christ shares here. We need to remember that this world remains enemy territory. We aren't called to go on some offensive in our strength to take it. It's Christ who will inevitably be victorious. In the meantime, we are called to fruitful faithfulness and to enjoy our assurance in him, living in certain hope of his return.

29.4 Read Luke 21:10-19

He continues to describe times of trouble "nation will rise against nation", there will also be natural disasters and "signs in the heavens". Note that the idea of nations going to war with each other suggests a time when the pax Romana is no more and so would suggest that Jesus is looking beyond AD 70 (v10-11).. Even before those troubles come though, Jesus' followers will face persecution, both from Gentile authorities and the Jews (v12). Arrest and trial will give them opportunity to testify about Jesus. They are not to worry about what to say, Jesus himself will give them the words and not only that but will provide them with powerful, convincing arguments (v13-15). They are to expect betrayal even by close family and to be universally hated and vilified (v16-17). However, "not one hair on your head will perish", they can expect divine protection. Many would of course die martyrs' deaths but the promise here is for eternal security (v18). Jesus exhorts them to stand firm.

29.5 Read Luke 21:20-24

Jesus provides the people with overt signs for when events will take place. First, the sign of Jerusalem's fall or "desolation" will be that the city will be surrounded by enemy armies. Mark associates these events with the imagery of Daniel 9:27 which describes a ruler setting up an "abomination that causes desolation."²⁰⁰ Luke doesn't carry that exactly allusion although the sense of desolation is still present. (v20). This doesn't actually leave much time to act, as there's a sense in

²⁰⁰ Mark 13:14. This is usually considered to be a reference to Antiochus IV Epiphanes who ruled the Seleucid Empire from 175BC. This was part of Alexander the Great's domains that were divided on his death. Antiochus had introduced the worship of Zeus into the Temple. In terms of what Jesus meant by the phrase in Mark 13, there has been much discussion, it could refer to specific events such as the Roman legions bringing their standards in or perceptions at different stages of departure from true worship. We may also recognise Jesus' own death as a horrific evil, a signpost to coming judgement and desolation.

which it's downfall will be upon them before they even realise it. However, there seems to be a small window of opportunity for escape and Jesus urges them to use it. You should escape the city if able to and even the immediate vicinity of Judea will not be safe. The people are encouraged to head for safety in the mountains because Scripture will be fulfilled as judgement or vengeance comes (v21-22).

Jesus expresses "woe" for those who are pregnant or have young children at that time because this will be a distressing time to attempt to raise children. There will be great distress on the whole land²⁰¹ and wrath or judgement on all the people (v23). The people will suffer great bloodshed and many will be put to the death and many more into captivity or exile. This is seen as the judgement of the nations or Gentiles but it is also for a fixed period of time, "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (v24).

29. 6 Read Luke 21:25-28

The description of "signs in the sun, moon and stars" may refer to distinct cosmological signs such as eclipses and the death of specific stars or appearance of new stars.²⁰² It is also possible that cosmological language is used to refer to rulers and authorities, emperors and empires in which case the language is being used to emphasise the upheaval of nations also portrayed as like "the roaring and tossing of the sea."²⁰³ The point is that the World will be turned upside down and people being overwhelmed (v25-26). It will be in the context of such tumult or "at that time" that Jesus, referred to by the title "Son of Man" will be seen "coming in the cloud with power and great glory", an echo of Daniel 10 where one "like a son of man" approaches "the ancient of Days." Jesus says that when these things happen, we are to stand and take courage "lift up your heads" because our redemption is close at hand which suggests that we are to see indicators of Christ's return to make all things (v27-28).

29.7 Read Luke 21:29-33

We can tell when it is spring because the trees have leaves and blossom, this tells us that summer is coming (v29-30). In the same way, the signs Jesus talks about point to the coming of God's kingdom, summer and with it harvest are approaching for God's people (v31).

Jesus then declares that "this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened." How is this possible? There are a few options here. First, that Jesus envisages all of these things happening within the disciples' lifetime. This would mean that either he was mistaken or that in some way the events were fulfilled. This would mean that in some way, that AD70 fulfilled the whole prophecy including the image of Christ as The Son of Man coming with/on the clouds. Alternatively, Jesus could be focusing back in specifically on the fall of Jerusalem or even on the wider signs taking place. In other words, that would mean that all of the signs necessary to indicate his imminent return would be fulfilled within the lifetime of his followers. They could expect to see coming upheaval and trouble.²⁰⁴ Another possibility is that the generation referred to is not intended to be a specific chronological generation in time but rather it refers to a people group, either to the Jews, even as a rebellious generation or to those who had faith, the generation or people of God's new covenant (v32). How can Jesus' listeners be sure of these things? Well, whilst things like generations

²⁰¹ Or literally earth-but the reference to "the people" suggests this is focused on a specific geographical area, i.e. Judea not on the whole Earth.

²⁰² Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 1005.

²⁰³ See Tom Wright, *Luke for everyone*, 255.

²⁰⁴ Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 1010:

and even heaven and earth pass away, are temporary and fleeting, Jesus' word is described as eternal, it means that it cannot be broken or gone back on. His word is reliable (v33).

29.8 Read Luke 21:34-38

The temptation for Jesus' followers is to be overwhelmed with anxiety about coming events and that might lead them to seek distraction and escape with parties and drinking or simply to be overcome with cares, to become depressed. If they do, then they will be distracted and surprised when "that day" (a reference to the Day of the Lord, or judgement day) (v34). Jesus insists that the day is coming and no one can escape it (v35). Jesus continues to teach and preach through the festival time and spends the night out by the Mount of Olives (v36-38).

29.10 Signs of what?

When the disciples hear Jesus talking in terms of the end of the Temple, the thought is so earth shattering that they seem to think in terms of the Day of the Lord or Last Days. This prediction feels like it is "world ending." Now, it is worth remembering that for Jewish hearers, the idea of such a day would be different to how many Christians think today. Even in terms of what the disciples were asking Jesus about, their thoughts at that stage would have been less about a kind of "end of days" scenario in the sense that this World would be destroyed and people either taken to heaven or some kind of new creation. Nor, at this stage would they have been thinking in terms of a "second coming". Rather, they would have been thinking in terms of a coming Messianic kingdom and would have had a growing awareness that Jesus was that King. Incidentally, whilst a shocking confirmation to hear from Jesus, the idea of this temple's destruction should not be seen as in itself a perceived obstacle to the coming Kingdom. Some of the sects and groups at the time, particularly the Essenes considered the Temple and priesthood to be defiled and corrupted.

Yet, Jesus in his answers does seem to have in mind that he is soon to depart via The Cross, Resurrection and Ascension, so that he will be physically absent for a period before returning. This has opened up questions about the extent to which Jesus focuses in his answer on events in AD70 and the extent to which he is focusing primarily on signs of the Second Coming. We might envisage a sliding scale here. Sometimes this text is read almost exclusively as a future event (to now), so that in effect Jesus is saying "yes, the news about the Temple is shocking but I've got bigger news still."

At the other end of the scale is what is known as "Preterism". In its purest form, this argues that all of the prophecies in the New Testament have been fulfilled and so, we are not to expect a future, physical second coming. So, a future coming of Christ is thought of in terms of the establishment of his kingdom through the Holy Spirit. The destruction of the Temple is seen as playing a significant part in the hand over, a removal of old wineskins and replacement with new. Christ's "coming with the clouds" is associated with this, so that the destruction of the Temple confirms that all authority and power is given to him. The argument is that in Daniel, the one who looks like a son of man is coming towards the ancient of days not departing from him to come to us. From that perspective, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is seen as closely tied in with Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The "signs in the heavens" are seen as political events described in cosmological language. Some preterists would argue that the key signs and prophecies have been fulfilled but still expect the physical return of Christ at some point.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Nolland seems to take a preterist position saying that "there seems to be no reason to deny to the historical Jesus an expectation of impending judgement upon his People, nor to question that he would as Jeremiah before him, have focused his expectation of impending judgement on Jerusalem." Nolland, Luke 18:35-24:53, 986.

That this is a continuum suggests a middle ground where Jesus sees AD70 as significant, so that it confirms we have been in the last days since the coming of the Holy Spirit, recognises significant fulfilment at that time but looks forward and sees greater fulfilment to come. Unlike in the first case though a much closer connection between Jesus' return and AD70 is perceived. A key reason for arguing this is that whilst Daniel talks about a son of man coming with the clouds and moving toward the ancient of Days, the NT language is less about fulfilment of this as a prediction and more about employing the imagery to refer to a significant and visible event that demonstrates Christ's kingdom authority. A focus on Christ's second coming would fit better too with the sense of "your redemption drawing near".²⁰⁶

A preterist perspective would fit with the sense of "this generation" referring literally to the people of Jesus' day, although it would be possible for Jesus to mean that the generation of that time would see the beginning of the events. However, if we assume a more futurist meaning then "generation" there is likely to refer to God's people as a nation/generation.

29.11 What has this got to do with us

Both Preterist and Futurist positions can risk being seen as an excuse for us to distance ourselves from the application of Luke 21. If Jesus is either talking about events that might be a long distance in the future or were a long time ago in the past, then what have they got to do with us? However, Jesus' warning of not becoming weary or distracted is relevant to all of us. We are reminded that we can expect trouble, trials and testing. We are not to use such things to attempt to set chronological dates., Rather, they remind us that God is effortlessly sovereign, that all things are working to his agenda and timings, and that Jesus will come back.

²⁰⁶ V 28. See Wilcock who observes that "Jesus discourages a 'countdown' interpretation of prophecy, by which events can be plotted in sequence to show how far we have yet to go to judgement day. Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke*, 187.

30 Handed Over

We now move into the last two days of Jesus' earthly ministry and his last meal with the disciples. All of the Gospels give extensive space to the last meal, though John focuses much more on the conversation and Jesus' teaching and does not mention the actual sharing of the meal and particularly the bread and wine. He does however expand on the dispute between the disciples over status with an extended narrative showing Jesus stepping in not just to correct but to model an alternative as he washes their feet taking on a servant's role.

There have been some questions around potential discrepancies, in particular that John places the offering of the Passover on the day of Jesus' execution itself, vividly presenting Jesus as the lamb. Possibilities include that more than one calendar was being used leading to a diversion of dates or that whilst the main Temple sacrifice was offered on a specific day, people had dispensation to vary the time in their own homes. Carson meanwhile suggests that the term Passover could refer to the day, meal or entire festival in which case, Jon 19:14 probably is referring to this and to the day of preparation for the Sabbath at the end of that week.²⁰⁷

30.1 Read Luke 22:1-6

We are getting close to the Passover, when the Jews commemorated God rescuing them from Egypt. This was sometimes referred to as "The Feast of Unleavened Bread" because the people had quickly prepared bread without yeast for the final meal in Egypt. Jesus was in Jerusalem specifically for this festival (v1). The Jewish religious leaders wanted rid of Jesus but could not confront him directly themselves because the people were on his side. So, they needed a pretext to remove him (v2). Judas Iscariot comes to them and offers to find a way to betray Jesus. It is fascinating that people often discuss why he might have done this, what his motive was though the Gospels are clear on two things, he was paid for it (and known for his greed) and Satan entered him.²⁰⁸ Beyond that, I would caution against speculation, though we may perhaps infer a link between his decision and what has just been reported. If Judas was expecting an immediate Messianic revolution then warnings of longer terms wars, rumours of wars and false reports of the Messiah's coming combined with advice to flee danger would hardly have inspired wannabe zealots. Judas was acting under the direction and influence of the Devil. The language used is similar to that of demonisation but by Satan himself. What we tend to spend less time concerned with is as to the nature of the betrayal. Partly, it seems to be that the leaders were looking for an opportunity to bring Jesus in at night when the crowds were not present and so to get their story straight. This meant that having someone who could lead them to where Jesus and his followers were camping and perhaps by being seen with the guard to give the impression that their presence was known to Jesus and planned.²⁰⁹ However, we are not told whether Judas' involvement went further, for example if he was an informant offering details of what Jesus had said in a way that could be spun against him (v3-6).

30.2 Read Luke 22:7-23

The day when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed arrives and so Jesus sends Peter and John to make sure things are prepared. He tells them they will be met by a man carrying a jar of water, this would have been a signal as usually this was a woman's role. They were to follow him to a house and

²⁰⁷ DA Carson, *John*, 603-604.

²⁰⁸ C.f. Bock, *Luke* 9:51-24:53, 1704.

²⁰⁹ Nolland, *Luke* 18:35-24:53, 1031.

there explain that their master needed the guest room. Note that this suggests pre-arranged signals rather than prophetic prediction. Even, the form of words they are to use echoes the preparation and signals for getting the donkey for the procession into Jerusalem. Everything happens as Jesus said it would (v7-13).

At the meal they recline on couches as was the custom rather than sitting on chairs as seen in popular, later portrayals of the Last Supper. Jesus says that he has been longing for this moment, not just to eat Passover with them but this specific one because of what it represented as his last Passover with them before his death and the coming of the Kingdom (v14-18). He shares round a first cup of wine, again reminded them that he won't drink wine again until the promise is fulfilled at the Kingdom comes (v17-18).

Jesus shares bread and wine with his disciples. He breaks the bread and says "this is my body given for you." Note, that Jesus was actually present doing this, so whatever he meant by "this is my body", he certainly wasn't introducing the idea of transubstantiation. Rather, he was saying that there was something about the bread and its place in the meal that linked with his death. And presented it as sacrificial. Jesus says that he offers his body for, or on behalf of the disciples. It is something that they are to benefit from. They are to eat the bread as an act of remembrance of him. The emphasis there should be on "of me". The Passover meal was already an act of remembrance but now Jesus changes the focus from the Exodus to his coming death (v19). Jesus describes the cup of wine as a symbol of a new covenant that he is now being made by God through his blood being shed. Note that whilst we often think of it representing his blood, Jesus doesn't use the same "is" language as he does for the bread and his body. Instead, his focus is on the cup's covenant role. His shed blood will bring about that covenant. Consider too the sense that if Jesus is instrumental in bringing about the covenant that this should be seen as pointing to his divine nature and identity. It's God who makes covenants (v20).

Jesus adds the comment that the one who will betray him was present at the meal and this shocks the disciples. They are left confused and wondering which of them could do such a thing. Matthew tells us that Jesus offers more explicit pointers to Judas, as someone close and sharing a bowl with Jesus as the one and even at this stage Judas seems surprised to be identified.²¹⁰(v21-23)

30.3 What does "this is my body" mean?

One of the central debates between Protestants and Catholics, indeed between Reformed Protestants and most other forms of Christianity is over the nature of Communion and what happens to the elements. Roman Catholicism teaches transubstantiation, that in some sense the elements become the body and blood of Christ. Orthodox churches would also teach a form of "Real Presence", that the bread and wine become Jesus' body to the worshippers although they prefer not to use the term "transubstantiation" due to all the metaphysical underpinning involved. Lutheranism has sought to stay clear of transubstantiation by teaching "consubstantiation", Christ's body is present alongside or along with the bread and wine without replacing them.

The Reformers divided between Zwingli's view that the supper is merely a symbolic memorial and Calvin's that we do not feed on Christ physically but that it is more than a memorial, so that in some sense we "feed on him in our hearts".

Much of the debate seems to descend into metaphysics and misses what is going on in terms of the Supper. We in effect rip it out of the context of the Passover and lose its significance. It is worth

²¹⁰ Matthew 20-23.

recalling that the reason that Jews, to this day, eat Passover is to remember the day when the Israelites were delivered from the Angel of death and brought out of Egypt through the Red Sea.. Remembrance seems to be more than just looking back historically to an event in the distant past but keeping it live and immediate by acting it out, an active participation. I would suggest that the reason that the Israelites took the route through the Jordan to Jericho so that a new generation could act out, or recapitulate, so actively participating in the Red Sea Crossing. That would then have implications too for what it meant to those who went to be baptised by John. So, there is a sense in which as you eat Passover now, you eat that first Passover with those who came out of Egypt.

Jesus takes symbols from the meal and links them to himself “this is my body.” I want to suggest that before they symbolically represented him, they represented the whole meal. The unleavened bread having of course its own significance. Note that if Jesus wanted to make a narrow link, then the lamb itself would be the better symbol but he is there present as the sacrificial lamb. So, Jesus is including the whole meal, it’s a physical and edible set of brackets, bread and cup enclosing the whole meal. It’s this whole meal that points to Jesus and now, when they “do this”, they are not to remember rescue from Egypt but the salvation they have in Christ.

30.4 Read Luke 22:24-30

The disciples still do not get the significance of what is happening and begin jostling and arguing about position and status in the coming kingdom (v24). Jesus interrupts them and rebukes them. John tells us that he does this practically by taking on the servant’s role of washing their feet. Jesus says that they are behaving like Gentile rulers, squabbling for status and power (v25). They are not to be like this but instead they are to become as younger ones and servants to each other, just as Jesus has come as a servant (v26-27).

At the same time, Jesus recognises that they have been faithful to him and so will be rewarded by being assigned kingdom authority, ruling from thrones. That they are to rule the twelve tribes confirms previous imagery that Christ is instituting a new or renewed Israel with twelve apostles representing the twelve tribes.

30.5 Read Luke 22:31-34

Jesus warns Simon Peter, note the use of “Simon” rather than “Peter” or rock in addressing him, that he is going to be tested by Satan. The imagery of Satan seeking to test one of the Lord’s own echoes the testing of Job (v31). Jesus has prayed for Simon that he will not fail but the expectation is that he will. However, Jesus also expresses confidence that Simon Peter will return and be restored to kingdom service as a shepherd of God’s people (v32). Peter protests and insists he will stand firm with Jesus (v33) but Jesus insists that by the morning, Peter will have denied him (v34).

30.6 Read Luke 22:35-38

Circumstances are changing, a time of intense struggle is coming. So, where Jesus had previously sent them without provision for short term ministry, now he encourages them to prepare. Both going without provisions previously and making provision now can be seen as acts of faith. This even includes provision of weapons (v35-36). This is another way of warning them of the serious and catastrophic nature of what is about to come, that he is going to be betrayed and killed (v37). They respond by saying they have two swords. His response is “that’s enough” which could mean that the two are enough swords which would suggest that he isn’t expecting them to actually fight, the sword language is symbolic of the violence to come. Or, the words could mean something along the lines of

“that’s enough talking now.” Either way., the point seems to be that Jesus isn’t getting drawn into a practical conversation about self defence (v38).

30.7 Read Luke 22:39-46

They go out to the Mount of Olives. This would be where many of the festival attendees would camp out at night, hence the need for a guide in Judas to lead the temple guard to Jesus (v39). Jesus goes off by himself to pray and encourages his disciples to pray as well in order to resist temptation. He prays, asking God to provide an alternative way through this but expressing his submission to the Father (v42). He is refreshed by an angel, just as he had been refreshed by angels after his wilderness tempting but continues to experience deep emotional pain reflected in the blood in his tears (v43-44). He returns to find the disciples sleeping (Matthew tells us that this sequence is repeated more than once). He rebukes them and exhorts them to pray again (v45-46).

30.8 Read Luke 22:47-53

Judas turns up with the Temple guard. He greets Jesus with a kiss to identify him in the dark to the guard and Jesus picks up on the incongruence of the greeting (v47-48). The disciples now realise what is happening and offer to step in to defend Jesus. One of them (it’s Peter), lashes out with one of the swords, wounding the High Priest’s servant by severing his ear but Jesus rebukes them, tells them to stop and heals the man (v49-51). Jesus then challenges the guard pointing out that they could have arrested him at any point in daylight. So why didn’t they (v52-53).

30.9 Read Luke 22:54-62

Judas betrayed Jesus, just as predicted and Peter would deny him just as predicted. Despite the bluster when warned, that he would never deny or desert and despite his foolhardy efforts with a sword in the garden, Peter would end up disowning his Lord. When Jesus was taken away by the guard, Peter followed at a distance, another disciple, considered to have been John also gained access to the High Priest’s house where Jesus was taken (v54). Peter waits by a fire in the courtyard and is approached by a servant who thinks she recognises him as with Jesus. He insists not (v55-56). A little later someone else says that Peter is one of Jesus’ group. Again he denies it (57-58). A third person says that Peter is one of the disciples and recognises his Galilean accent. As Peter is strenuously denying the claim, two things happen. First, the cock crows as dawn comes and second, Jesus is led through and looks at him. A broken, shamed Peter flees in tears (v59-62).

30.10 Was Jesus really expecting the disciples to act in self-defence?

Why did Jesus instruct his followers to buy swords as part of their readiness for what was to come? Some Christians have used this to argue that we should not be passive in the face of coming political threats but be ready to act in self-defence. Usually, the encouragement is to use political means to resist perceived dangers to Christianity, particularly Islamisation. However, there is an implication there that if necessary, Christians can go further in their act of self-defence.

This though is to miss the point of what Jesus is saying. That Jesus speaks in the immediate context of his coming arrest and that when that time comes, he rebukes the disciples, forbids violence, heals the injured man and repeats the command “Enough now” should provide us with enough clues that he wasn’t intending his words to be taken as literal advice to arm yourself, legally, politically or with weapons. Rather, the mention of swords is simply a vivid and visual warning of the coming strife

they would face. The priority of believers in the face of intense testing is seen in Gethsemane to be prayer.²¹¹

²¹¹ See Wright, *Luke for everyone*, 266.

31 Tried by sinful men, mocked and beaten then, nailed to a cross of wood

We are now moving into the account of those last hours of Jesus life, a night facing inquisition, accusation, mockery and beatings that will continue into the final morning. All of the Gospels give significant attention to those events. Luke does not give us the detail of Jesus' night time appearances before the High Priests but focuses on Peter's denial and moves quickly to the early morning decision to hand Jesus over to Pilate. Mark 15:53-64 fleshes out the appearance before the Sanhedrin. Where Luke focuses specifically on the question as to whether Jesus claims to be the Christ, Mark also brings in accusations relating to Jesus stating he could rebuild the temple if destroyed, within three days. This would be seen as a Messianic claim. Mark also makes explicit Jesus' positive response to the question "Are you the Messiah?"²¹² Matthew closely follows the text of Mark (Matthew 26:57-68). John provides additional detail telling us that Jesus is brought to the house of the previous High Priest first. As Caiaphas' father-in-law, it seems that Annas still carried some clout.

31.1 Read Luke 22:63-71

Whilst Peter is outside denying his Lord, Jesus has been taken into the house under guard. The temple guard mock and beat Jesus (v63-65). At daybreak, Jesus is brought before the ruling council, the Sanhedrin. They question him "are you the Messiah?" Jesus points out that whatever he says, they won't believe him and they can't offer straight answers to such questions themselves (v66-68). However, Jesus tells them that he is going to be exalted to the right hand of God. They recognise that this is a claim to special authority "does this make you the Son of God" and his response is to the effect of "those are your words". They treat this as a confession.

31.2 What exactly were they accusing Jesus of?

It's important to remember that those questioning Jesus did not have a fully fledged doctrine of the Trinity. So, we should not read this through our own lens as simply as Jesus being accused of claiming to be God, though he is. We know from John's Gospel that they understood his claim to sonship to indicate some form of equality with God but exactly what that entailed may not have been thought through. Rather, the focus on Messiahship and sonship may well have been political because sonship and messiahship both meant kingship and that gave them a reason to go to Pilate.

31.3 Read Luke 23:1-24

Jesus is taken by the Sanhedrin to appear before Pilate. They accuse him of rebellion and treason by claiming to be King and encouraging people not to pay tax to Caesar. Given Luke 20:20-26, this is fascinating. They are either outright lying or they considered his answer there to be negative towards taxes. This would suggest that his comments were taken as along the lines of "Sure give Caesar back what is his but you shouldn't really be under his rule" (v1-2). Pilate asks Jesus if he is King of the Jews and he responds with the same "you have said so" formula (v3). Pilate however does not see this as an out and out claim and so tells the leaders that he has nothing to actually charge Jesus with (v4). The Sanhedrin are insistent that Jesus is stirring up trouble but let out that Jesus is from Galilee. Pilate sees this as an opportunity to get Jesus off of his hands since Galilee is Herod's jurisdiction, so he sends Jesus over to him as he was in Jerusalem at that moment (v5-7).

²¹² Mark 15:62.

Herod was keen to see Jesus having heard a lot about him already. He plies him with questions but his main aim is to get Jesus to do a miracle for him. Jesus refuses to answer (v8-9). The priests and scribes bring their accusations before Herod. Provoked by Jesus' silence, Herod's response moves from intrigue to mockery. He joins with his soldiers in mocking and sneering Jesus by dressing him up as a pretend king and sending him back to Pilate. Herod and Pilate had been enemies in the past but something about this encounter unites them, perhaps the sense that they are on the same side in dealing with a difficult people with Caesar's eye on them (v10-12).

Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate who summons the priests, rulers and representatives of the people. He tells them that he hasn't found any truth in accusations that Jesus is guilty of inciting an insurrection and nor has Herod. All the same, Pilate says that he will punish Jesus. He will then release him (v13-16).

This compromise proves unacceptable. The crowd demand the release of Barrabas, a man who ironically is imprisoned, awaiting punishment for insurrection and murder. Pilate appeals to them but they shout "crucify him" (v18-20). ²¹³ Pilate appeals to them a third time (notice the parallel with Peter's denials). A three part response rhetorically suggests completeness. He has exhausted all efforts. The crowds shouts prevail. Pilate accepts that they will not be persuaded. Barrabas is released to them and Jesus "surrendered to their will" (v21-24).

31.4 Read Luke 23:26-43

We know from the other Gospels that Jesus was subjected to intense torture and beating by the Romans whilst in their custody. Luke cuts out much of the detail, although he tells us that it is another, Simon of Cyrene who is required to carry the Cross for a much weakened Jesus (v26). A crowd follow Jesus including many women, mourning him. However, he turns and tells them to mourn for themselves not for him because of the coming destruction on Jerusalem. A day will come when they would prefer to be buried alive than to witness the horrors that are coming. He observes that if people can do cruel deeds at this time, then as the days grow darker, worse is to come (v26-31).

They reach Golgotha, or the Place of the Skull and prepare him for crucifixion. He is stripped of his clothes and they cast lots, gambling for them. There are two others crucified with them, sometimes referred to as thieves but more likely bandits or insurrectionists like Barrabas. Jesus prays forgiveness for those crucifying him. They are ignorant as to the full implication of their actions (v32-34).

As he is crucified, Jesus is mocked by the people and their leaders who cast doubt on his claims to be Messiah, he cannot even save himself. The soldiers also mock him, serving him wine vinegar as a drink, again questioning his claim to kingship and challenging him to save himself. Pilate has a notice hung above Jesus declaring him "King of the Jews". This is who he is being crucified as, this is his offence (v35-38).

One of those being executed with Jesus joins in the insults. However, the other rebukes him and points out that they are there justly whereas Jesus is not. He then acknowledges Jesus as King, and specifically the King who will conquer death because he asks to be remembered by Jesus when he

²¹³ Nolland suggests that the people were already expecting Barrabas to be released as part of a traditional pardoning. Barrabas would have been popular with the people and so it is possible that they feared that Pilate intended to use Jesus as an excuse to swap around the planned pardon and release. Nolland, Luke 1835=24:53,1133.

comes into his kingdom, or receives authority. Jesus tells him that he will not have to wait for some future eschatological point. “You will be with me in paradise today” (v29-43).

31.5 Today you will be with me

Jesus’ response to the man on the other cross settles an important question. There was to be no delay between the man being with Jesus. Whether we hold to a form of “soul sleep” or presume consciousness after death, this removes the possibility that we cease to exist until the day of resurrection.

31.6 Read Luke 23:44-56

There is an eclipse of the Sun bringing darkness in the middle of the day. Jesus commits his spirit to his father and dies. Something else significant happens, the curtain dividing of f the Holy of holies is ripped in two. The Centurian overseeing proceedings seems struck by something about the way Jesus dies and so declares him righteous. The crowds mocking turns to mourning. His followers observe at a distance (v44-49).

A man called Joseph who was a member of the Sanhedrin but had dissented from the judgement comes and asks for the body. Joseph seems to have, like Nicodemus been at least favourable to Jesus. He was one like Simeon and Anna who had been looking for the coming kingdom (v50-52). He takes the body and has it wrapped in lined cloth then buried in a new, unused tomb, cut into the rock. It was the day before the Sabbath which would officially start at sundown (v53-54). The women from Galilee observe where the body has been buried and return to where they are staying planning to bring back spices and ointments to anoint the body. They rest on the next day in keeping with sabbath law (v55-56).

31.7 The perfect sacrifice

The focus in the accounts of the Last Supper is away from the lamb and on bread and wine. This may well be to emphasise that Jesus is the one being presented as the sacrificial lamb. The eclipse and darkness echo the imagery of 2 Chronicles 7 where the dedicated Temple is overpowered by the Glory of God. Whilst we tend to think of darkness as negative, 1 Kings 8:12 tells us that God dwells in thick darkness. The imagery here is less to be seen as evidence of divine grief as it is a pointer to divine satisfaction with the sacrifice.²¹⁴ The tearing of the veil in the temple also points to the affect of Christ’s sacrifice. The divide between the holy and profane is removed. Through Jesus’ death, we are granted access into his presence at the very place where forgiveness and atonement are provided for. Whilst this is not the actual destruction of the Temple, it does indicate that its role is now redundant. God has accomplished atonement through different means in another place.²¹⁵

Whilst the accounts of Jesus’ trial, mocking and beating do not shy away from the facts of the crucifixion, the text in all the Gospels is terse. Unlike Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ”, the focus is not on gory detail but on bare facts. Our focus is meant to be less on how much suffering Christ experienced, though the suffering was very real. Rather, our focus is meant to be on the atonement that Christ makes as the one given for us, or on our behalf.

²¹⁴ Green also picks up on the eschatological significance of darkness and the last days (c.f. Amos 8:9 and Zephaniah 1:15). Green, *Luke*, 825.

²¹⁵ Green, *Luke*, 825.

32 He is Risen

All of the Gospels conclude with resurrection accounts but there are variations between them. Some of the variations are straight forward to resolve as they simply demonstrate where the writers go into more depth. For example, Mark, perhaps as the earliest account and fitting to a scroll to enable a single hearing cuts off at the point where the women find the tomb empty. They are frightened, bewildered, encounter the angels but flee still not understanding because they have not yet met the risen Jesus. Luke includes more detail of that first day introducing a meeting between Jesus and disciples returning to their home village. John offers the most extended account, reporting on an appearance on the second Sunday where Thomas who had been absent on the first Sunday is present and called to leave behind his doubt. John also takes us to Galilee where the disciples go to meet with Jesus and he appears to them by the lakeside at breakfast time.

Some of the accounts seem a little harder to reconcile. For example, do the women go to the tomb before sunrise or after? And when does Mary meet the risen Jesus? I believe that these variations are reconcilable when we remember that they are accounts of the same events told from different perspectives but where the authors would have been aware of the other witness accounts. They do not contradict but compliment. I will have a look at how the account fits together later but first of all, let's look at how Luke reports it.

32.1 Read Luke 24:1-12

It's the first day of the week, the women had prepared to anoint Jesus' body but could not act because Saturday was the sabbath. Early on the Sunday, they go towards the tomb. When they get there, the stone has been moved and they find the body gone (v1-3). Two men are there, notice that they are referred to as men but their description suggests that they are angels. The women's response of fear and bowing down also suggests this. The angels ask a question: "why are you here?" The women are in the wrong place. Note that the angels know who the women are and why they are there (v4-5). But they are in the place of the dead when Jesus is alive. Then the messengers remind the women that Jesus had predicted that he would be killed and would rise again. The women at this point remember what Jesus had said. Note that for Luke, remembering is connected with understanding, not just the mere recollection of events (v6-8).²¹⁶

The women (who are named at this point as Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Jesus' mother), return into Jerusalem and find the apostles (v9-10). They tell them what has happened but are not believed. The apostles think they are mad. It seems that Luke wants to draw a sharp contrast between their response and the women's. After all, it was women disciples who had stayed with Jesus through the crucifixion when the others had scattered. Perhaps this is why Luke goes light on their initially fleeing in terror as reported in Mark 16:8 (v11).²¹⁷ However, Peter runs to the tomb and sees it as described. Luke adds an important detail that the graveclothes are still there. It would be strange if Jesus had swooned and then recovered or if the body had been stolen for the grave clothes to be removed first. Despite seeing the evidence for himself, Peter is still trying to piece together what has happened (v12).

32.2 Read Luke 24:13-35

²¹⁶ Green, Luke, 838.

²¹⁷ Green, Luke, 839.

Two of the disciples²¹⁸ decided to return home to a village about 7 miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, on the way they were talking about the recent events. As they are walking and talking, Jesus joins them. We are told that they are prevented from recognising him. There has been much discussion as to whether or not Jesus' body had been substantially altered, whether by the torture he suffered or the resurrection and whether or not we will recognise one another with our resurrection bodies. However, the emphasis here is on a limitation on their part. It's that they are restricted in their ability to recognise. (v13-16).

Jesus asks them what they are talking about and one, Cleopas responds asking how their companion can be ignorant to the events in Jerusalem that weekend (v17-18). They then proceed to recount to him about what has happened. They describe Jesus' betrayal, arrest, sentencing and death. They say that the body now is missing and describe the reports from the women, though they clearly have not grasped the significance. They express their own disappointment because they were looking to Jesus to be the redeemer or rescuer of Israel (v19-28)

Jesus responds "How foolish you are", note that they are still prevented from recognising him even though he uses language typical of his teaching. He reminds them that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer before being glorified. Then he talks them through Scripture, showing how it all, starting with the Torah and then going into the Prophets and writings was pointing to him and his death and resurrection (v25-29).

When they reach Emmaus, they persuade him to stop and eat with them. It is as he blesses and breaks the bread that they are allowed to recognise him but at that point he disappears. If before they were bewildered at their companion's ignorance as to the events in Jerusalem, now they are astounded at their own ignorance about his obvious identity (v30-32). They rush back to Jerusalem to share their news only to discover that Jesus had also already appeared to Simon Peter (v30-35).

32.3 Read Luke 24:36-49

Jesus appears to the gathered disciples even as they are talking. He is able to appear and be present even into rooms with locked doors. They are bewildered and frightened even though some have already met with him and think they are seeing a ghost. Jesus invites them to observe his wounds, to touch him and to know he is really alive, he is flesh and bone, not a ghost (v36-39). They are not to doubt. He also eats with them (v40-43).

Just as on the Emmaus Road, he shows them how Scripture points to him and is fulfilled in his life, death and resurrection. By opening Scripture, he opens their minds to the truth. Then he reminds them that God has promised the Holy Spirit (v44-47). They are to witness for him but first they are to wait for this "clothing in power" (v48-49).

32.4 Read Luke 24:50-53

At some point, Jesus leads the disciples out to the Bethany area. We know from the other Gospels and the beginning of Acts, that this was later on, that there were other appearances and that they finally meet on the Mount of Olives (v50a). There he blesses them before ascending to heaven (50b-51). Having already references the commissioning whilst still in Jerusalem and giving more details of the ascension in Acts 1, Luke keeps this to a short summary telling his readers that the disciples return to Jerusalem praising God. This mirrors the shepherds returning to their flocks praising God at

²¹⁸ We are only told the name of one of them, Cleopas (v18).

the start of the Gospel. Again, we know from the other accounts that they initially remain gazing into heaven and angels challenge them and send them back (v52-53).

32.5 Reconciling the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection

We know that it is early in the morning when the women set off to the tomb. If they head off at dawn, then it is likely that the sun would have begun to rise as they left where they were staying. They may well have been staying in Bethany which is two miles from Jerusalem. So, they would have left in darkness and arrived in day light. It is as they are on the way that there is an earthquake and the stone is rolled away. They are debating how the stone can be moved as they walk but arrive to find it moved and the angels there. The angels tell them that Jesus is not dead but risen.

Still bewildered, they turn to flee but on the way they meet Jesus. It seems that Mary has been separated from the main group of women. It is possible that Peter and John have stayed separately from the other disciples who having scattered first perhaps returned to Bethany. Mary does not meet Jesus on the way but instead finds Peter and John who run to the tomb and find it empty. At some point, Peter meets with the risen Jesus. Mary having returned with Peter and John remains weeping by the tomb where she meets the risen Jesus, mistaking him at first for the gardener.

In the afternoon, Jesus appears to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, possibly Eleopas and his wife. That evening he appears to the disciples with the exception of Thomas. He appears the following Sunday and then meets with them again in Galilee as reported in John 21. It's there that Jesus commissions the disciples (Matthew 28:19ff). Jesus meets again with the disciples at the Mount of Olives and ascends to heaven.

32.6 The Man in heaven

Luke's Gospel may be seen as fitting together with the second volume, Acts so that we start with the Emperor in Rome sending out his decree and finish with Paul seeking to meet with the Emperor in Rome. This is a "to the ends of the earth" missional account. Luke wants us to get the big picture that there is good news for all. At the heart of that mission though is the end of the Gospel and start of Acts which puts the focus of the good news on the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus which we are meant to read as coming together into one event.

Luke finishes his Gospel and begins his second book with good news that Jesus has not only risen but ascended. That Jesus is in heaven is important for two reasons. It answers the questions "where is he" and "where are we meant to be?"

32.6.1 Where is Jesus?

The simple answer is that he is ascended. He is now in heaven. It's that little, overlooked but crucial day in the Church calendar, perhaps because it falls in the middle of the week on a Thursday. We know the big hitters, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost but 40 days after Jesus' resurrection is "Ascension Day." I probably only knew about it growing up because I went to a CofE primary school and so each year, we were matched off up the road to the church one Thursday each year.

And we might miss it skimming over a few words as we get to the end of Luke's Gospel. Jesus is blessing his disciples, and even whilst he was doing that, "he left them and was taken up into heaven." Luke fleshes this out a bit more in Acts 1.

Why does this matter? Well here are five vital implications that otherwise we would miss out on.

First, he is in heaven, seated on the throne, his work is done. One of the things that fascinates me about Luke's Gospel is the way that we aren't just hearing Jesus's story but Luke is telling us bigger stories and those bigger stories are in turn intended to point us in to Jesus' story. So, in the early chapters, Jesus retraces the Exodus, testing in the wilderness and entering into the promised rest of the land. In Luke 24, he shows how the how of Scripture was pointing towards his death and resurrection. Here, we see him showing what god does when he completes his work. In Genesis 1, we are told that God rested on the seventh day, not that he needed a break and a nap but that like a king, he sits enthroned, ready to delight in and receive the worship of his creation.

In the same way, we are told in in Hebrews 8:1 that Jesus has "sat down", that he is exalted, seated in heavenly places. His work of salvation is now complete and we are truly a new creation in him.

Second, he is in heaven, he intercedes for us. Jesus had risen bodily from the dead and now he bodily ascends to heaven. For all kinds of reasons, we are not meant to think that the God part of him decoupled. Hebrews 7-8 again emphasises that this means, if we have the man, Christ Jesus in heaven, then we have our mediator, our high Priest representing us before the Father.

Third, we are raised up with him. Ephesians 1:3-14 makes this point, that spiritually we are seated with him. This means that if he is exalted above all hostile powers and authorities and we are with him that we have nothing to fear.

Fourth, The Spirit has been sent Jesus, in John had told his disciples that if he was going ahead of them, that he wouldn't leave them alone. He ascended to Heaven and then sent the Holy Spirit, 10 days later meaning that God indwells each of us, all around the World. The ascension means that God is present with his people in an amazing way that he wasn't before.

Fifth, the promise was that just as Jesus had departed, in the same way, we could look forward to his return. He have sure and certain hope that he is coming back and this links to our sure and certain hope of resurrection. We aren't just going to float off into the clouds in spirit form. We will be with Jesus in his new creation because he is fully God and fully man.

32.6.2 Where are we in response to this?

We best answer this by seeing what happened with the disciples. They were to be found in the Temple, worshipping God. In fact, specifically, they were worshipping Jesus. The resurrection and ascension combined to leave them in no doubt about Jesus' identity as God.

We too should be drawn to worship, this is meant to be our place in the story, praising, delighting and giving thanks to the one who has saved us and conquered death. A further implication, not immediate to this passage is that if we have received the Holy Spirit then as well as worshipping, we should be witnessing, trusting in God's power and presence with us.

32 The Focus of the Gospels

It is now that we have completed a detailed look at one of the Gospels that we give a better answer to what the Gospels are meant to be about. We know that Luke writes so that his readers will know the certainty of the truth that they have heard and John writes so that his might believe who Jesus is.

What we may add to that is this. First, there is a purpose beyond this. It is not for mere private, personal benefit that we are to know and believe. Rather, all of the Gospel writers have a purpose beyond that. Luke tells us that Jesus had said that his followers were to receive power and to be his witnesses. Matthew describes Jesus commissioning his disciples to do just that. We are meant to be witnesses, sent out as the apostles were sent in order to make more disciples.

How do the Gospel writers help us to believe so that we are equipped to witness. Well, the clues are there in Luke 24. They do so by not just reporting on the life of Jesus but showing how his life, death and resurrection, his every word and action is a fulfilment of the whole of Scripture. Jesus is the one who fulfils the law and the prophets so that we can receive forgiveness through repentance.