

# Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke

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Note: this is a draft copy that still needs editing

## #1 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 1

Luke is officially an "anonymous" Gospel, but early church history and tradition identify Luke (the physician) as the author. This would fit what we read in the book, as his writing style and general knowledge betray his status as part of a "professional" class. This book has a lot to say about how people of means and in high positions can use these to serve the Lord. It seems Luke was preaching to himself when he emphasized these points.

The prologue underscores the careful research that underlies the narrative. It also indicates that Luke is writing true history--not a fabricated fairy tale. If we believe the Gospel is a myth, then we reject Christianity. We cannot adopt a middle ground.

But Luke is also writing an interpretation of the events of the life of Jesus. He uses a word in the prologue to emphasize this point, describing these events as things that have been "fulfilled" among us. This organically connects his story to the Old Testament, and also the eschatological (i.e. eternal, ultimate) future. Luke is telling Theophilus that eternity has come! The kingdom of God is at hand.

The theme of the first two chapters is contained in the word of the angel to Mary in 1:37: "For nothing will be impossible with God." Every story in the first two chapters underscores this common theme. With man many things are impossible. But nothing is impossible with God.

It is impossible that a couple too old to conceive could have a baby through mere human power. But John's conception in Elizabeth's old age shows us that nothing is impossible with God.

It is impossible by human means for a baby to be conceived without a human father. But in Christ's virginal conception, we see that nothing is impossible with God.

It is impossible that a grown man would be made temporarily mute, but then have his tongue loosed at the exact moment previously predicted. But nothing is impossible with God.

It is impossible by human strength to have fellowship and communion with God. But God has come down through his impossible power, uniting in one person two natures in an ineffable union: without conversion, composition, or confusion. This is impossible with man, but nothing is impossible with God.

It is impossible for man to cleanse himself from his sins. But God has remembered his gracious promise. Although he is perfectly just and will by no means clear the guilty, he has provided a substitute who can satisfy for our sins. In this way, God's perfect justice and rich grace are equally expressed in our redemption through Jesus. Nothing is impossible with God.

Do you see the theme? It's central to the opening chapters because it's central to the Christian faith and our lives in Christ. We face impossible circumstances all the time (by human standards). We easily grow discouraged, and sometimes seek to give up. But it is in these very moments that our faith in God's impossible power is expressed.

As we saw in Matthew 28, that power is manifested through the ministry of the word in his church. It is not ours first to act in our own power but to trust in God's power. This means that central to our lives is our constant going back to the word of God. From it alone receive strength and power to do his will.

This is what it means to walk by faith and not by sight; to be justified by faith and not by works. This is particularly difficult in our long-term relationships which can so often feel strained and be the source of so much misery. To scoff at the possibility of redemptive change in ourselves or others is to deny God's impossible power. It is to respond like Zacharias in unbelief.

Instead, it is ours (with Mary) to respond with faith. In every situation we trust him and his power, saying: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

## #2 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 2

Luke 2 is a theologically dense chapter. The contents of the chapter are bracketed by the reigns of two different Caesars: Augustus and Tiberius. This is a signal of how Luke will develop a contrast between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. The Christian life will be lived in the tension between these two. The world's kingdom will have a totalitarian, imperialistic bent that seeks to squash the testimony of the kingdom of God. But the Lord's kingdom will triumph in the end.

That kingdom has its roots in the Old Testament. The middle of this chapter is preoccupied with outlining how Jesus fulfills the promises of Moses and the prophets, especially the Davidic kingdom.

Under the rule of Caesar, Joseph, and Mary will be directed back to their hometown of Bethlehem where Jesus will be born. The angels will declare that "...unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

But this king will reign over far more than Judah or even a reunited Israelite kingdom. The angels declare "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Jesus' reign shall know no end. All those on earth and in heaven will acknowledge and glorify it.

But Jesus also comes to fulfill the law of Moses. This is an emphasis of verses 22-39. Jesus was purified "according to the law of Moses" and "as it is written in the law of the Lord." His parents brought him into the temple "to do for him according to the custom of the law." The section concludes in verse 39 by stating that "they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord."

Jesus came in to bring God's kingdom. He also came to fulfill the law. Not only was he perfectly obedient to the commandments, but he fulfilled all the ceremonies as the final sinless sacrifice. He fulfilled the law's commands, and he also suffered the punishment the law demanded.

He would die not just for the sins of his Jewish brethren, but for the sins of his people throughout the whole world.

That is not to say Israel was totally rejected. There remained a faithful remnant in Israel that was awaiting him. They are beautifully represented in two figures in the narrative. First, there is Simeon, whose dying eyes longed to see God's salvation in Christ. He was able to hold the Christ child in his arms before he departed this life in peace. We also see this remnant in Anna who had been waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Jesus comes to accomplish at work, but he does it only for a people who loves him and longs to have him.

And can it be any other way? If Jesus comes to bring us eternal life and a kingdom that will be the Lord's, how can he not be the chief affection and longing of our hearts? We cannot have the words of God on our lips while our hearts are far from him.

### #3 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 3

Luke 3 begins with a large time jump. Chapters 1-2 took place mostly in the first year of Jesus and John starting from the time of their conceptions. At the end of chapter 2, we saw one brief story of Jesus during his boyhood. Even at that young age, Jesus was very conscious that he was the eternal Son of God, stating to his earthly mother and father that he must be in his Heavenly Father's house.

Chapter 3 takes us roughly 18 years into the future. A new Caesar has arisen, but the world has not fundamentally changed. Its basic problem is sin. The solution is faith and repentance. That can only come through the power of God through his word.

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius, the word of God came to his people. It sounded forth a call to repent to prepare the way for the Lord. Luke references the prophecy of Isaiah, which metaphorically speaks of mountains being made low, crooked places straight, and rough places level. Sin makes us crooked. It twists God's truth. Only the work of God's grace through repentance and faith can straighten us out.

John also performs a baptism as a visible sign and seal of this repentance. Baptism uses water. That is, in part, a reminder that sin not only makes us crooked--it also makes us filthy. Just as water removes dirt from the body, so only God can wash the heart.

But baptism is also a sign of judgment. John connects water baptism with the fire of judgment at the final harvest when the chaff will be burned. Only water can quench the flames. Jesus refers to his own crucifixion as a baptism that he must undergo. In Luke 12:50 he says: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished."

The significance of this imagery is difficult to understate. It takes us back to the waters of creation, the great flood in the days of Noah, and the waters of the Exodus in the time of Moses.

For now, we simply note that baptism is a reminder that we cannot escape judgment. Some view God's salvation as a mere lessening of God's standards to make it easier to get to heaven

by our good works. We conceive of him as an indulgent grandparent whose sentimental emotions make them overlook the flaws in their grandchildren.

It is not so with the Lord God. He is perfectly just and will by no means clear the guilty. Salvation does not consist in the mere removal of judgment, but in its perfect satisfaction.

That is why Christ himself is baptized. He has no sin from which he needs to repent, but he will bear the sins of others. He will undergo baptism-judgment for them, that they might be on the straight path to God.

He will baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire. We will either endure judgment in ourselves and perish or endure judgment in him and pass through safely.

Jesus is the Son of God, beloved of the Father. The genealogy which concludes the chapter underscores that Jesus is the second Adam. He came not only to deal with the sins of Israel, but with the sin of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam.

This concluding note is also a reminder that Jesus, not Caesar, is the true king. The Romans called their Caesar's "Divi Filius" in Latin, which means "son of a god." Luke begins with Caesar and ends with Christ to mark the great transition from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God.

Salvation will not come through Caesar's kingdom but through the cross of Christ.

#### #4 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 4

Luke 4 begins with the temptation of Christ. Jesus has just been presented as the new Adam and Son of God at the end of chapter 3. Like the first Adam, the second Adam must endure temptation from the devil. Where the first Adam failed, the second Adam prevailed. Like the apostle Paul, Luke is definitely building a “two Adams” theology as we work through his Gospel.

However, there are some differences between them. These serve to highlight the radically different circumstances in which they face their temptations. Adam was tempted in a lavish garden filled with fruit. He could eat anything he wanted with one tree forbidden. Jesus is tempted in the desert while fasting. He can eat nothing, and not even a morsel of bread is set aside for him. A garden for Adam. A wilderness for Jesus. A feast for the first man, a fast for the last.

Adam had everything going for him in terms of his environment. The world was perfect and blessed. Jesus had everything going against him. The world was sinful and miserable.

It is not without significance that each of the temptations of Satan connect to the idea of avoiding suffering. If Jesus turns the stones into bread, he will no longer be hungry. If he bows down and worships Satan, he will have the goal at the end of the cross without the suffering. If he casts himself down from the temple, he can possess already God’s protective care without actually enduring the hardships.

The temptations of Jesus by Satan are a preview of what he will endure on the cross. There the people will mock him saying “he saved others, but he cannot save himself!” The reality is he could have ended his sufferings in a second if he wanted, calling down 10,000 legions of angels at his defense. Instead, he endured the cross, despised the shame, and became our redeemer.

Just as Jesus defeated Satan by the power of the Spirit, so he began his ministry by preaching in the power of the Spirit. In fact, he declares the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled where it speaks of the coming servant of the Lord filled with the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, he references ministries of Elijah and Elisha, who were endowed with the Spirit and ministered God’s word not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. This fits in with Luke broader story in his Gospel and Acts, traces the spread of the Gospel to the nations.



That Spirit comes with the authority of God. That Spirit brings the kingdom and rule of God. Jesus demonstrates the authority of that word in his casting out of the demon. In verses 32 and 36 the narrator and the crowds both recognize the authoritative power of the word of Jesus. By his raw authority he forces the demons into submission. The demons obey, but shudder. How shameful it is when we as his disciples so often do not.

The chapter fittingly concludes with a purpose statement from our Lord. He tells us that the reason he came out was to preach his word: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43).

This is quite something. Most would think that the greatest expression of Jesus power is in his miracles. It is not. Christ's power is found most potently in his word. The same word that casts out demons, raises the dead, give sight to the blind, stills the storms of the sea, and feeds the hungry also comes to us to feed our souls to eternal life.

This Jesus still preaches. He does so Sunday by Sunday through his appointed servants. In them we hear not the voice of men but the voice of Christ. Do you hear it? Do you see the glory of his power? Do you trust him for all that you need in this life and in the life to come?

## #5 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 5

Luke 5 begins with a short section of miracles arranged in a reverse parallel. If we were to visualize it, we could map it out like this:

A - Jesus calls the first disciples

B - Jesus cleanses a leper

B - Jesus heals a paralytic

A' - Jesus calls Levi

The last chapter ended with an emphasis upon the authority and power of Christ's word. The reason he came out is to preach the word.

These four sections all emphasize and illustrate the power of that word. It is with the word that he calls his disciples and later Levi, and through the same word that he commands them to let down their nets for a large catch. It is with his word and touch that he cleanses the leper saying "I am willing, be clean!" It is with his word that he forgives the sins of the paralytic and causes him to rise up and walk.

Do you see the pattern? Christ's power and his kingdom come through his word.

That word comes to bring healing: it is not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick. The word works repentance for sinners. Jesus is the great physician.

But he is also the eschatological (i.e. final, ultimate) bridegroom. He initiates the wedding feast, and his people rejoice in his presence. Not so the Pharisees and scribes, who challenge him at every turn, rejecting the blessedness of his kingdom.

We may not have Jesus physically present among us. He has left us, but not as orphans. The Holy Spirit dwells with us through his word that abides with us. Although miracles have ceased with the passing of the apostles, his greatest work still continues: forgiving sinners and

welcoming them into his heavenly kingdom. He calls us today even as he called Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Levi. Shall we not then follow him wherever he leads?

## #6 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 6

Luke 6 contains a section that actually began at the end of the previous chapter. If we visualize its structure, it looks like this:

- A - Jesus calls Levi as a Disciple
- B- The Pharisees Grumble about Food
- B- The Jews are Angered at Sabbath healing
- A - Jesus calls the Twelve as Apostles

This structure serves to highlight the contrast between the Jewish leaders and Jesus's disciples. The old is passing away. Something new has come. The old Israel is being rejected as they are rebelling against God. They are sick and dying. Christ comes to make them well.

Theologically speaking, the section underscores that Jesus is the eschatological bridegroom promised in the Old Testament. We are used to the Bible describing Jesus as a bridegroom and the church as his bride. Ephesians and Revelation use this image quite memorably. But we often forget that it comes as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 61:10). In describing himself in this way, Jesus is saying that in him God has arrived as the bridegroom for his people!

In addition to bringing the wedding feast, Jesus also brings in the true Sabbath rest. Jesus observed the Sabbath as God intended it from creation and reiterated in the Exodus. Our life pattern consists of six days of ordinary labor and a seventh day of holy rest to worship God. This Sabbath was made for man. It was to be a blessing and help to him as a forced "vacation" with a spiritual focus. He would be reminded of God's goodness in both creation and redemption. It would also allow him to focus his full attention to ultimate, eternal things once a week.

For the Pharisees, the Sabbath became just another law that you had to grind your teeth and obey. They missed its true purpose. And so they grow angry when Jesus eats the grain in the field on the Sabbath day. The location of this story reminds us of the first creation. Man walks in nature's glory and eats freely of the fruit of the garden. Only now instead of luscious fruit, there is just simple grain. The Creator himself walks among man once again.

And what is the response of the Pharisees? To tell God himself that he is breaking the Sabbath. Even David ate holy bread as a work of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath. Shall not God also feed us?

Beyond this, the Pharisees grow angry when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand. Blind to the hardness of heart, they fail to see the Sabbath as a pledge of eternity, when all will be restored in resurrection and heavenly glory. The man receives a foretaste of that before their very eyes, and their heart is filled with rage that he would dare challenge them.

This chapter also contains Jesus's "Sermon on the Plain." It is similar in content to the "Sermon on the Mount" found in the Gospel of Matthew. There is no contradiction between the two. Jesus did similar miracles multiple times (see the feedings of the "thousands"). He also taught the same material in different ways on different occasions.

Luke's version of this material emphasizes the contrasts between God's kingdom and the kingdom of this world. The two are in conflict. The conflict was introduced in the previous chapter and highlighted just before this.

So Matthew begins only with "blessings" or "beatitudes," but in Luke Jesus explicitly contrasts blessing with woes. Blessing for the empty, but a curse for the full!

Likewise, it concludes with a similar contrast between those that build on the sand or the rock. Hearing and doing is contrasted with mere hearing with no doing. Destruction for the one, salvation for the other.

In between the contrast is developed in terms of the relationship between the two groups. The believer must patiently embrace suffering with joy from their enemies. They must love their enemies and pray for their persecutors. They must not judge others as the Pharisees do, building comparisons with other men to puff themselves up before God.

Self-analysis is the hallmark of the members of the kingdom. A critical spirit that is always pointing out the flaws in others is a sign that the heart's focus is misplaced. If we are concerned

to highlight inconsistencies and failures, we have plenty within us to occupy ourselves for quite a while. Put away your magnifying glass to analyze others and just look in the mirror.

Such is the good fruit of the kingdom of God that our Lord desires for us. Let us then not only hear these words but obey. Let us make this our aim this day: when we are tempted to criticize another, stop ourselves and spend five minutes thinking about how you might be guilty of the very thing you are pointing out in your brother. Pray to God. Ask for grace for yourself. When you feel sincerely repentant about your failures, then perhaps go and tell your brother his fault. More likely, once you have done that I think you may find that the best thing you can do is pray for them and wait for God's timing to bring a gracious word to help.

## #7 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 7

If Luke 7 can be boiled down to a single theme, it would be the exaltation of the lowly in the kingdom of God. This takes many forms, but the greatest expression of exaltation is salvation from death.

The chapter begins with the healing of the Centurion's servant. The Centurion was in an exalted position in Roman society, as he had command over 100 soldiers. But he was also a God-fearer and highly regarded by the Jews. His servants plead his case to Jesus, arguing for his "worthiness" in that he loved the Jewish nation and even built the synagogue. But when Jesus arrives at his home, the centurion says: "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof..."

Although the centurion is in an exalted position, he knows that when he stands before Jesus he is with the Lord. The centurion does not trust his own power and authority. Instead, he trusts in Christ's word: "...just say the word and let my servant be healed."

The centurion thus embodies the principle of faith in a way that causes Jesus to marvel: "...not even in Israel have I found such faith."

In the next story, Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead. To be a widow was to occupy the lowest position in ancient society. A true widow had no family, was entirely destitute, and wholly dependent upon others for her sustenance and well-being. The only way to have a lower position is to be dead, which is exactly where her son finds himself. Destitution and death have come to her. Most women take comfort that in their later years they will be surrounded by children and grandchildren. The fruit of their hard work in their younger years comes to fruition. The fruitful vine comes to fullness.

But not so with this widow. Sin has born its ugly fruit. The joy of new life is reversed with great pains in childbearing and bereavement in loss.

But Jesus has entered this sinful world. He comes to exalt the lowly. While the whole town weeps for her, Jesus tells her: "Do not weep." With his mere word, he raises the young man to life. Jesus exalts the lowly, even giving life to the dead.

The next story contains a dialogue between the disciples of John and Jesus. At this point it should be fairly obvious to John that Jesus is the Messiah. He has seen and heard of many of his miracles. He was also present at his baptism where God the Father and the Holy Spirit testified to his status as the Son of God.

Yet John finds himself in prison. Luke doesn't mention this detail, but other Gospels do. He thus faces a dilemma. Jesus has power to heal, cast out demons, and raise the dead. Yet John finds himself in prison. Why? How can the great John the Baptist be in such a low position?

We know this is at least part of his struggle because of what Jesus says in response. After outlining the many signs of his Messianic identity, Jesus says: "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (7:23). The lowly will be exalted, but the exalted must humble themselves. The response of Jesus is thus a subtle rebuke to John's weakness of faith.

The chapter has shown how Jesus's power and grace prevent and save from death. The source of death is sin. Jesus reverses both. Death is reversed with the life-giving power of God. Sin is reversed through forgiveness. As God has forgiven us, we must forgive others. Thus the chapter concludes with Jesus's forgiving the sinful woman along with the parable of the moneylender. The lesson is clear: he who is forgiven much loves much. He who is forgiven little loves little.

The chapter is sending us a clear message. If we are to enter the kingdom of God, we must humble ourselves. This comes to expression in our quickness and eagerness to repent and forgive. That is the measure of our faith.

What is characteristic of your life? When you sin, do you quickly acknowledge your wrong, or do you aggressively defend yourself or even prosecute your accusers? When others sin against you, do you place yourself before the Lord and realize that you have also sinned against him? Do you quickly and cheerfully from the heart forgive others? Or do you hold grudges for weeks, even years?

To defend ourselves is to exalt ourselves. To repent and forgive is to humble ourselves. Christ exalts the lowly and lowers the exalted.



This is not an optional part of our life in Christ. In the Lord's Prayer, we say: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." If we are going to claim that Christ has forgiven us, we must repent and forgive others. If we do not, this prayer will testify against us before the judgment seat of Christ.

Our forgiveness of others is not the ground or basis of our forgiveness. But it is the necessary fruit that demonstrates the reality of our faith. Bitterness, anger, selfish pride, nursing hurts and grudges are all contrary to the life Christ calls us. Even our repentance needs repentance!

But Christ is gracious. He never demands perfection of us, but accepts what is sincerely offered from a heart of faith.

## #8 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 8

Technically the beginning of Luke 8 really belongs with the previous chapter. Like the previous passages, it emphasizes the exaltation of the lowly. Women were typically on the lower rungs of the ancient social order. Christianity is decried nowadays as being “anti-women” because it describes the marriage relationship as having an authority-submission dynamic. The reality is this is only one dynamic among many. The husband and wife are both Christians in fellowship with each other, friends who have each other’s best interest at heart, and fellow human beings made in God’s image. Authority and submission, rightly understood, functions within a broader context of love, care, and selflessness. The total rejection of authority and submission as part of the marriage relationship sounds like “freedom,” but it leads to chaos, disorder and misery. We can no more remove submission and authority (rightly contextualized) from human relationships than we can remove them from our relationship to God. The truth is that the advance of the Christian faith in the first century marked one of the largest elevations of women in history. Simply stated, no longer viewed merely as servants under a male patriarch, they came alongside their husbands as fellow heirs of Christ to be lovingly lead in the mutual service of Christ. This is no proto-feminism of a secular variety that seeks to completely deconstruct human culture along raw, egalitarian and post-modern lines. It is a return to God’s design in creation. He created Eve not out of Adam’s feet to be dominated by him. Nor did he make him out of his head to be ruled by him. He made her out of his side that she may come alongside him as a suitable helper in mutual service to God (thank you, Matthew Henry!).

It is thus noteworthy that chapter 8 begins by noting that with Jesus were not only the twelve, but also “some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. He goes on to explicitly name Mary Magdalene, Joanna (the wife of Herod’s household manager!), and Susanna among many others. They had no teaching office like the twelve. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, these positions of authority are reserved for men only. Their activity with respect to Jesus is that of motherly-feminine care and provision. They are either patronesses to provide for his needs financially or diligently working with their hands to provide food and clothing. Although this work is lowly in the eyes of the world, it is exalted in the eyes of God. After all, it is only a handful of these women who refuse to abandon Jesus on the cross while the twelve disciples either deny or betray him.

It is thus interesting that in the other parts of the passage we see women highlighted. Jesus’s family is described with the phrase “his mother and his brothers.” Apparently, his father is no

longer alive, and his mother has become a family matriarch. Later in verse 40 and following Jesus performs two miracles to help women in their misery: Jairus's daughter is raised to life and the woman with the flow of blood is healed. A young girl and an old woman: the lowliest of the rungs of ancient society. But they are exalted by Christ's healing touch.

We have experienced an unprecedented attempt in the last 50 years to blur the distinctions between men and women. To be sure, some old evils have been corrected. But the overall results have been disastrous. There are far fewer children, and many of them grow up without their mothers to care for their needs. People are making more money with double income homes, but have much less time to enjoy it. What they do have extra is often eaten up with daycare and other child care costs. Women grow into adulthood thinking they need to pursue careers as their highest aim, only to suddenly find themselves on the tail end of the years of childbearing realizing their decisions were not what they actually wanted. That is not to say it is always wrong for women to pursue careers, exercise their gifts outside the home, or perhaps delay having children for certain reasons. It is to say that the exaltation of these things and a rejection of motherhood is not a position that is truly pro-woman. It rejects the value of what is truly feminine and forces women to find meaning only in what is masculine.

The true exaltation of the feminine is not to reject it and replace it with the masculine. Teaching young women that they can essentially approach life the same way men do is actually a back door form of male domination. The "masculine" becomes the ideal that the feminine must attain.

Jesus and the Bible exalts the feminine by celebrating what is unique to it. God himself did this when he appointed what is a uniquely feminine task (childbearing) to be the means by which the redeemer would come. It is not that a woman is unable to do most of what a man can do. It is that she has been blessed with the ability to do something that no man can ever do: become the mother of all the living.

There is no greater exaltation of the feminine than what is held out in the Christian faith. Women are celebrated not insofar as they are able to live and act like men, but precisely in what they are able to be and do that is uniquely feminine. The feminine ideal of the Bible--the height to which any woman can attain--is to be a mother with child. She is the most blessed among women. A man cannot equal this God-given height.

Luke highlights these women in their "low" societal positions because they are in the perfect position to be exalted by God's grace. Their redemption is not through rebellion and forced revolution, but in quiet patience waiting for the exaltation that only God can bring.

This is the reality for all Christians--both men and women--as they await the coming of their Savior.

## #9 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 9

Jesus gives his disciples both power and weakness. The weakness comes insofar as he calls us to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow him. We have to lose our lives to keep them.

The power comes from God's grace and Holy Spirit. He empties us of our sinful selves to make room for the fullness of Christ. Then we can say with Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Luke 9 begins with Jesus giving his disciples both power and weakness. He gives the 12 disciples authority over all demons and authority to cure diseases, to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to heal. This is an unprecedented measure of power entrusted to mere human beings. Prophets of old were able to perform occasional miracles. But I am unaware of any Old Testament figures that had the power to exercise demons. Wherever they go, hordes of people will surround them as they did Jesus, desperate to get but a morsel of the power of the kingdom of heaven entrusted to them. If anyone has power, it is the disciples!

But Jesus also calls them to weakness. On the journey, they are to take nothing with them: no staff, bag, bread, or money. All they are allowed to have is the clothes on their back. Some mistakenly understand this passage to necessitate a vow of poverty for Jesus's disciples--or at least church officers. This is a serious misinterpretation of the passage. The call is specific and occasional for the disciples. Think about it: if you had the power to work miracles such that you could feed thousands with a few loaves of bread, you wouldn't need to take food or money with you either!

But Jesus does call them to embrace weakness. As far as heaven are concerned, they are seemingly all-powerful. As far as the earth is concerned, they are weak and have nothing. God's power is perfected in their weakness.

Thus, the response to their ministry will also be mixed. One would think that with this kind of power to heal everyone would accept them. If they ran for elected office, they might not get a single negative vote! But Jesus emphasizes that some houses will not accept them. They must

be prepared for rejection and defeat. They are called to weakness even as they possess God's Almighty power.

The next section is a reminder of this same call in the life of John the Baptist. As far as influence and power were concerned, there were fewer greater than John the Baptist.

But Herod simply declares: "John I beheaded..." He who proclaimed repentance unto life suffers defeat and death. The powerful are called to weakness.

Next, Jesus takes them to a desolate place with no food, with a crowd of five thousand around them. There is nothing to eat and no place to buy it. As far as the earth is concerned they are empty and weak. But Jesus feeds them with the power of heaven. All are made full with five loaves of bread and two fish.

The disciples thus must live like Israel in the wilderness: not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Like Israel before they are fed with the bread of heaven. Only now the true bread has arrived!

The same point is made in the scene with Peter in his confession that Jesus is the Christ. For Peter, this confession means that Jesus is a powerful figure. He is the "Messiah"—the anointed king of God who has all authority committed to him. Peter understands this, but he does not have a full picture of Jesus's Messiahship.

Thus Jesus reveals that as the Christ of power he is also called to suffer. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (9:21-22).

To reassure them that his sufferings do not negate his power, Jesus reveals his future glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Interestingly when he does so he waits until they are asleep. Their spiritual weakness contrasts with his power and glory. What a sobering reminder that they must trust always and only in his strength! The same point is made in the next scene when they are unable to cast out a demon, Jesus is able to do it. Their weakness contrasts with Jesus's strength, which the text says is a revelation of the "majesty of God" (43).

After reiterating his future sufferings in 9:44 (words that must "sink into their ears") he reminds them of his call to weakness by appealing to the image of a child. We have to receive children in the name of Jesus. There is nothing weaker among men than a little child. When we receive children in Christ's name, we receive Jesus. He literally came into this world as a lowly infant: God's power manifested in the weak.

As much as the point is being emphasized, the disciples still don't get it. They are filled with their own egos and sense of self-importance. As Jesus predicts his death and sufferings and reveals his superior power, they are arguing among themselves about who will be the greatest! [By the way, if you are not seeing yourself in the disciples and/or just laughing at their blindness, you are also missing the point! We are all so filled with ourselves we don't even realize how blind we are to God! They are a mirror for us to see our own shortsightedness!].

The disciples' blindness is further revealed in their call to bring down fire from heaven upon those who reject him. Jesus came to embrace suffering and awaits a rejection that will culminate on the cross. At this time he has come to bear the judgment of others, not bring final judgment on his enemies. Likewise, their desire to reject other followers who are not in their "group" reveals their spirit of self-absorption.

Finally, the chapter concludes with some cryptic statements by Jesus that emphasize the same points. The world is dead. The only life it has is in the word that proclaims the kingdom of God. Christ has no home on earth, and we sojourn as strangers here through him. We must be dead to the world, and be willing to embrace weakness in it if we are to follow Jesus.

For no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. We must embrace weakness, trusting that God will work his power in us.

## #10 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 10

It is quite easy for us to become enamored with ourselves. As sinners, we are naturally self-centered. We think the world revolves around us--or that it should be that way.

The sinful preoccupation with self is a double-edged sword. It can lead to either arrogance or depression. When we compare ourselves with others and see ways we are better, our egos are boosted. But we do the same as see how others might excel where we are weak, we grow envious and discontent. The two outcomes look quite different, emotionally speaking. But they both spring from the same sinful root.

In the previous chapter, we saw a series of scenes that emphasize the weakness of the disciples as they possess the power of Christ. One scene unique to Luke was the phrase "the one who is not against you is for you" (9:50). The flip side of this is the saying in Matthew: "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30).

This passage has caused confusion in some. It is a favorite of those who take a broader view of salvation, who argue that only those openly hostile to Christ will be condemned. This flies in the face of several other passages that explicitly deal with the indifferent and lukewarm, and is clearly incorrect.

In context, the saying is a rebuke to the disciples who view themselves as the sole possessors of the power and kingdom of Christ--at least the chief operating officers within it! The saying is thus a rebuke to sinful sectarianism in which people view themselves as the exclusive possessors of God's kingdom, not an affirmation of a liberal "big tent" view of salvation.

Interestingly in the next chapter, Jesus appoints 72 others in addition to the twelve who are given authority to cast out demons and to heal. Jesus did give these gifts to some outside the apostolic circle, but not to everyone. In this context, there is a strategic reason for this: he is reminding the disciples that they are not the sole possessors of God's kingdom and power. This is in keeping with the larger themes of Luke-Acts, which tell the tale of the spread of the Gospel to the nations.



Even the 72 are instructed in this regard. They are not to rejoice in their special powers, but in the fact that their names are written in heaven (20).

Whether in mighty word or mighty work, all these things serve to reveal the kingdom of God to his chosen servants. Jesus rejoices in the exclusive link there is to the Father through himself. No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him. Both the eternal Father and the eternal Son concur in an eternal act of election. In this, they chose some upon whom the revelatory light of the kingdom will come, while others will remain blinded in darkness. The exalted remain blind, but the humble are made to see and exalted.

The next section contains the interchange between Jesus and a lawyer. This Jewish lawyer knows the law, but he is still blind. He doesn't really understand it. The Son who alone knows the Father has not chosen to reveal himself to him.

So what is his problem? He understands that the law requires love. But he still seeks to limit the object of that love. In other words, he knows that he should love, but wants to limit who he should love.

The parable of the "good" Samaritan cuts right to the heart of his issue. In the parable, the priest and the Levite refuse to help the helpless man. But the Samaritan does. Samaritans were the "leftover" Jews from the Northern kingdom who had mixed Judaism and Paganism. They had been theologically and morally unfaithful to God. They compromised and got an easier life on earth. The Pharisees and more "conservative" Jews sacrificed to stay faithful to God and suffered for it. They weren't too happy with their "liberal" Jewish cousins and harbored some personal resentment.

But this Samaritan did what the law called him to do: he loved his neighbor as himself. His status as "neighbor" was not limited to those with whom he already had close, personal relations. He understood that it extended even to his enemies.

This parable is in keeping with the theme of Luke-Acts in the story of the Gospel going to the nations. It also wonderfully illustrates the love of Christ, who died for his enemies. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his friends, especially when those "friends" are still your enemies. Christ died for us to reconcile us to God. He didn't wait until we became his friends to love us.

The passage concludes with the story of Martha and Mary and their different interactions with Jesus. Martha is preoccupied with service. She is active and working to take care of the people in the home. On the one hand, this is a beautiful thing. As we saw in a previous chapter, many women provided for Jesus's needs (8:1-3).

Martha and Mary are sisters. They occupy the same house and share the same flesh and blood. But their approaches to Jesus are very different. Martha serves, but to the point where she becomes "distracted" by it. Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.

Here we see a practical illustration of The Bible's contrast between faith and works! Martha is distracted and just "doing" all the time. As she does so she is filled with anxiety and trouble. This seems to be a struggle for many women who are at times overwhelmed with the tasks and duties of motherhood and the care of their families.

Mary, on the other hand, has none of this anxiety or trouble. She is peaceful and happy to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his teaching. Martha is characterized by works motivated by human strength and effort. Mary is characterized by hearing with faith. Martha is filled with resentment because of the service with which she is preoccupied. She serves, but not with a servant's heart. She does things that are acts of love (externally speaking), but in her heart, she does not feel that love for others. Mary joyfully receives the good portion of hearing the words of Christ and receiving them with faith.

Both men and woman should mark this passage well. It is easy for us to think that the busiest and most active people are the best servants of God. In our country we put a premium on productivity. If we can't directly connect an activity to "results" we quickly seek to erase it from our daily agendas. Busyness is not a sure-fire sign of godliness. We see the spirit of Martha in the figure of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. Although his brother moves from death to life in his repentance, he is filled with anger and jealousy. How easy it is for us to forget the full implication of the doctrine of justification by faith apart from works! How quickly our desire to do things for others quickly becomes a way for us to establish our own righteousness before men and God!

The passage illustrates this struggle in a particularly feminine manifestation. I think a lot of you mothers out there reading this passage can probably really relate to Martha's struggles with having too much on your plate, being filled with anxiety, and being tempted to resent others.

But these are not fundamentally uniquely feminine problems. In different ways they manifest themselves in men as well. What Mary chooses is what every human being needs.

Indeed, Jesus says that "one thing is needful": is to sit quietly, calmly, and humbly at his feet to receive his word.

That is our true need. That is our true joy. If we have the word of Christ, we have God. Through the Son, the Father is revealed to us. If we have God, we have all. There is no room for resentment, worry, or anxiety where God's fullness is our sufficient portion.

## #11 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 11

Luke 10 ended with a scene filled with anxiety and trouble. Martha was upset that her sister Mary was not helping with all the housework and sitting idly while she listened to Jesus. Mary's contentment and passive calmness stood in contrast to Martha's distracted busyness and anxiety.

It's fitting that Luke 11 begins with an emphasis on prayer. Our anxieties are almost never calmed by a change in our circumstances. When one trouble leaves, the anxious person simply finds a new one to worry about. Our anxieties are like the demons: they may leave for a time but travel through water this place is finding no rest. Then they come back and are seven times worse. Instead of trying to change our circumstances to address our anxieties, we need to bring them to the Lord. We can do that only through prayer.

We face two temptations in prayer. One is to totally neglect it, and the other is to view it as a mere duty we perform for God. Both betray overconfidence in self in our approach to God. Jesus regularly rebukes the Jewish leaders for giving "long prayers" to be heard by others, along with the Gentiles who think they will be heard for their many words. Instead, Christian prayer is to be characterized by its reverent simplicity. We are like servants before a king; children before our honorable father.

We are called to pray for just about everything. But everything about which we pray must be connected back to central things: God's holy name, his coming kingdom, the basic provision that is necessary for this life, and the forgiveness of our sins along with our forgiveness of others. All of this must be done with a desire no longer to live in sin and be subject to temptation, but with a longing to be delivered from it that God might be glorified in our lives.

Like Martha, we are very easily distracted in our earthly sojourn. We get concerned about just about everything: our job, our kids, what other people think about us, whether we will get along easily in the world, and even great world affairs. These things are not insignificant. But compared to the central things, they are nothing. The kingdoms of this world are temporary, but God's kingdom is eternal.

What really matters is how we are relating to God and whether we are reflecting him in their lives. Are we trusting him? Are we seeking to glorify him? Are we confessing our sins to God?

Are we eagerly from the heart forgiving others when they sin against them? Our failure to do these things is vastly more significant in our eternal relationship with God than any other earthly thing. But we are far more concerned about the temporary troubles we face.

Insofar as we are sinners, we really don't like dealing with these deeper questions. They force us to confront our shortcomings and sins. We don't like the spotlight being put on ourselves. We would rather apply God's word to others than apply it to ourselves. This practice is deceptive. It gives us a feeling of engaging in spiritual, God-honoring activity. But in the end, in judging others, we only condemn ourselves.

God is all-powerful. He can do whatever he pleases in whatever way he wants. But he has ordained in his sovereign plan that his power comes to us through prayer. When we do this we trust that God loves us as his children. Rather than calling us first to actively work he calls us first to passively pray. In prayer, we are forced to cease from our labors and quietly ask for help. In prayer, we become like children who know they are unable to provide for themselves and are in need of constant assistance from their parents. That is a humbling thing. But Jesus tells us that we must become like a little child to enter the kingdom of God.

The next story emphasizes the power of Jesus over the demons. It makes sense that if the previous section dealt with our need to pray and trust in God's power it would be followed with a passage that demonstrates that power in Christ.

Clearly, Jesus has the power to cast out demons. But what is the source of his power? The Jewish leaders set forth the irrational notion that Satan is casting out his own demons. Satan is evil, but he's not stupid. No general in his right mind attacks his own soldiers. It is not by the finger of Satan but by the finger of God that Jesus casts out demons. This phrase recalls the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt through Moses. At that time the magicians recognized that Moses's miracles were done by "the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19). Both then and in Jesus's day, the powers of darkness were clearly contrasted with the power of light.

This section concludes with a rather cryptic statement regarding the movements of the unclean spirits after they have been cast out, who "pass through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none" (11:24). The point of this section is to de-emphasize the significance of exorcism. As with all the miracles, their true value is not in themselves. Exorcisms, healing, and other miracles certainly are an expression of the compassion and love of God to the afflicted. But the

point here is that even though a demon may be cast out of a person, they could always come back. Likewise, even those raised from the dead by Jesus had to die again.

The miracles point to the word. That's why the discussion of miracles is immediately followed by Jesus's declaration that "blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Jesus' physical presence and his miracles brought temporary life from death and freedom from the devil an exorcism. Jesus's word and faith in it bring eternal life and total freedom from Satan's tyranny. The Jews keep asking for a sign but are blind to the multitude of signs Jesus already has given. The only sign left for them is the sign of Jonah. In this context, it points to the death and resurrection of Christ. He in the grave for three days and then raised from the dead. After this repentance was preached to the Gentile nations. Both the Ninevites and the queen of the South are previews of the inclusion of the Gentiles. The spread of the gospel throughout the world is clearly an emphasis of Luke's Gospel, as well as the book of Acts.

But the Pharisees and Jewish leaders are blind. It doesn't matter how bright of a light you shine in front of a blind person, they are not going to be able to see anything. They see the outside of the cup and cleanse it thoroughly, but allow filth, mold, and rotteness to grow inside. They exalt the law but miss its core point: "love of neighbor and love of God." They obey God as if he were their slave master, but they do not love and adore him. They have a form of godliness but deny the power. God entrusted them with the key of knowledge. But they refuse to unlock the door of God's kingdom for themselves or for others. Instead, they locked it and blocked the way.

What a warning for the church of Christ. In the time of the Reformation, similar corruption had set in the Roman church. Thankfully, God blessed us with a Reformation in which the key of knowledge and the door of heaven was opened once again. It was opened through the simple preaching of the Scriptures in a way understandable to the ordinary, common man. At that time the worship and devotion of God's people was also reformed and simplified according to the pattern of the Bible. The man-made layers of tradition and external ceremonialism were replaced with the simple hearing of the word, singing of praise, along with prayer to God.

The struggle to maintain a faithful Christian testimony in word, worship, and daily living continues today. Like Martha, the church can easily get distracted with all kinds of nonessential things. Churches that struggle can be tempted to think the solution is in all kinds of external rearrangements of the "ecclesiastical furniture." When the church struggles people look for the solution in earthly forms. This can take many different forms: more "fellowship" groups, newer sounding music with "slicker" productions, a variety of programs for every demographic of

people, high definition screens upon which the songs and sermons are visually illustrated. While these things are not always inherently wrong in themselves, when used as an effort to "revive" the church they become a big distraction from the real way God's power is manifested: through the proclamation of his word. When God's word is sincerely believed and preached, Christ will always be central. Christ is the chief agent of the preaching of the word. He stands behind the earthly minister to bring his message to the people. Christ is also the content of the word. The Law, the Prophets, the Writings, and the New Testament all proclaim his work and our life of faith in him. God's word is sufficient. It needs nothing from us.

To the degree that we follow the other path we are forgetting what Jesus teaches us in Luke 11. The reform of the church corporately and our growth as individual Christians will come through the simple, ordinary things God has given us: simple, heartfelt prayer to God coupled with the humble hearing of his word.

There are many other things Christians try to do, many of which are not bad in themselves. But they can easily become distractions from our central task. Like Mary, let us choose the better portion and be content to sit prayerfully at Jesus' feet and hear his holy word.

## #12 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 12

It is common for Christians to divide the Bible's teaching up into two parts: a practical side and a doctrinal side. The distinction is not illegitimate but tends to separate what the Bible integrates. The problem is that when we abstract doctrine and practice we lose how interconnected they are.

The Bible is not a doctrinal handbook that needs to be made relevant by a teacher or philosopher. Indeed, it often comes to us in the form of history. The doctrinal lessons are embedded in the real-life situations of God's people.

Theologically speaking, this chapter of Luke emphasizes several important "doctrines." These include the omniscience and omnipotence of God, the eschatological presence of the Holy Spirit, the infinite value of eternal life and the kingdom of heaven, the care and love of God in his almighty providence, and the certainty of Christ's second coming.

But all of these have a corollary in some practical aspect of our faith and embrace of God's truth. Since this is a devotional I will focus on these--hopefully without unduly disconnecting them from their integrated doctrinal context.

The first point has to do with integrity of life and the dangers of hypocrisy. The chapter begins with an emphasis on the dangers of hypocrisy and ends on the same note (see 12:1 and 12:56). Hypocrisy and integrity are the opposite of one another. To be hypocritical is to say one thing and do another (you preach, but don't practice). Integrity is to act the same in all circumstances whether it is to our good or to our hurt, and even if no one is watching. God sees all. He will bring everything to light. The prospect that God will one day reveal and judge even secret thoughts is a great deterrent against hypocrisy. To the degree that we have faith in God and the presence of the kingdom of heaven, we will be people of integrity.

The second point emphasized in the passage regards how we value and treasure the spiritual realities of the kingdom of heaven. This is transparently set forth in the parable of the rich fool. The principle involved has to do with the infinitely greater value of the kingdom of God than any earthly thing (however vast). Where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also.



Thirdly, the passage also points us to the peace and trust of faith in God's fatherly care. The argument is from the greater to the lesser: if God has given us the kingdom of heaven, he will also give us everything we need in this life. The opposite of this peaceful trust is worry and anxiety. The anxious person is locked in a form of emotional bondage. The more you think about it, the worse it gets. The true solution for anxiety is trust in God's fatherly, providential care.

Interestingly, this leads to the final point: preparedness for Christ's kingdom. The anxious person is often worried about the future, and tries to place certain "controls" in place that will keep them safe from possible danger. One might think this is a godly "preparedness," but it actually isn't. True preparation for Christ's coming starts with its absolute certainty, as well as the assurance that when he comes he will welcome his faithful servants into his heavenly kingdom.

To those who are not prepared, he will come at an hour we do not expect. But to those who are patiently awaiting his coming, he will appear at the proper time.

### #13 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 13

The previous chapter ended with an emphasis on the need to be prepared for God's coming kingdom. The Jewish leaders clearly were not and did not recognize the signs of Jesus.

As John the Baptist reminded us before the beginning of Jesus's ministry, the way to "prepare for the Lord" is to repent. We have warnings of future judgment all around us in God's providence. In Jesus' day everyone knew of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, as well as the 18 people who died when the tower of Siloam fell upon them. There is no difference between us and them. We are all sinners. Unless we repent and prepare ourselves to meet God, we will all likewise perish.

This is the fruit that God's kingdom requires. That is why Jesus tells us to "bear fruit" in keeping with repentance. It is also why he goes on to tell the parable of the barren fig tree. Although they had been diligently called, the Jewish leaders and much of the people bore no fruit.

To be sure, they were quite busy and active with many "good" things. For one thing, they gave large sums of money to the poor. But it is one thing to be active and busy, quite another to do works of love from a repentant, forgiving heart. Sometimes the busiest and hardest working people can struggle the most with bitterness and resentment: I am doing my job, why isn't everybody else doing theirs? This is not the spirit of a forgiven sinner. The fruit God desires is not just activity, but deeds of love done from a grateful, humble heart. Only the repentant who have been prepared for the kingdom will manifest it.

Indeed, a lot of activity might seem good, but our life with God is not only about "work" but it's also about rest. Faith itself is resting in Christ: he is our true sabbath. Thus the next story describes how Jesus freed a woman from a disabling spirit that afflicted her for 18 years and kept her back bent in constant pain. She received true relief and rest at Jesus's healing touch. Yet the ruler of the synagogue was angry that Jesus would violate the Sabbath in this way. Of course, Jesus did no such thing. Thus he accuses them of hypocrisy: saying one thing and doing another. Even they walk their animals to water on the Sabbath. The Jews managed to turn a day of rest and refreshment into one with added burdens. Their extra prohibitions that guaranteed "rest" from ordinary labor actually became extra burdens. This is not the fruit of the kingdom of God.

The fact that the Jewish leaders and the people largely rejected Jesus presented the early church with a dilemma: how can you claim to have the word of the true God when so few are following you?

The parable of the mustard seed (in part) serves to address this. Jesus makes it clear that although the kingdom begins small, it will grow large. Although Jesus's disciples abandoned him and he went to the cross alone, in heaven there will be a company of saints so large it cannot be counted. Likewise, entry into this kingdom is a narrow door. Even many who "formally" followed Christ will not be allowed into the master's house.

Jesus's grace is such that he does not rejoice in the destruction of his enemies. That is not to say that he does not rejoice at their destruction in any sense. The point is that in his first coming Jesus came not to judge but to save. He came to die for his enemies, not to bring judgment upon them. He practiced what he preached, loving his enemies and praying for those who persecuted him. The time for judgment will come: the reprobate will be cast in the outer darkness.

But today is still the day of salvation. He calls us to enter his kingdom, albeit through the narrow door. Are we making our way through it? How can we tell? It is not by the amount of activity we are doing. This is not the fruit God desires of us. If so, the Pharisees would have made it well ahead of any of us. Instead, it is measured by faith and repentance. Are we resting in him who brings us true Sabbath rest, trusting in him to do what we cannot?

And are we repentant people? Do we spend all our time pointing out the faults of others while propping up our own significance and importance? Or are we daily struck by the fact that God would be so gracious as to forgive our sins and send his son to die for us even though we are unworthy?

Do we spend a great deal of time and emotional energy defending ourselves when confronted with our faults, or are we willing to humbly redeem even overblown criticisms recognizing the providential voice of God therein? Or do we twist the latter point in which we humble ourselves and use it as an excuse to constantly criticize others? The devil is subtle and his temptations know no end! To live humbly in repentance is the chief sign of membership in the kingdom of heaven.

## #14 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 14

Luke 14 has many themes. In it we see Jesus as the bringer of the true Sabbath rest, the bridegroom who brings God's final wedding feast, and the necessity of the cross of Christ for our redemption.

Practically speaking, the chapter sets before us the need to have an appropriate response to the realities of the kingdom of heaven. We must not only recognize that these things have arrived, we must truly value and treasure them above all other things. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves to receive the kingdom will be exalted.

This was not the case with the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Ironically, they had been specially prepared for Christ's coming, and were "experts" in the Scriptures—the very road map to guide them to the Messiah. They saw and could not deny that God's kingdom had arrived in Jesus. Yet they were only concerned with how he posed a threat to their power and authority.

A wedding feast had been prepared for them, but they did not properly respond to God's invitation. The exalted are humbled, and the humble are exalted. Those who at first occupied the lowest place are elevated to the highest. If we are to receive God's kingdom we must fully embrace our unworthiness. All notion of merit must be banished from our hearts. This means that the purely "transactional" approach to God and to our fellow man must also be crucified. We do not approach God thinking: "I will do this for God and he will do this for me." Instead, we give without desiring repayment. We love as God loved. Freely we have received, freely we must give.

There are no excuses for us in this regard. If we realized the greatness of the kingdom of heaven, we will drop everything to embrace it. If we think to ourselves that our earthly pursuits and duties are more important, we will not become heirs of the kingdom of heaven. Whether it's our great purchases of goods, fields, properties, or even our family connections, none of them can compare with what we have in the kingdom of God. Indeed, Jesus says Using his typical hyperbole, that we must hate our own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters in order to be Christ's disciple.

This does not mean that Jesus is commending real hatred. What Jesus is saying is that our priority must be so focused on the kingdom of heaven that our love for our families will be nothing in comparison. In this respect, relatively speaking, our love for them will look like hatred in so far as our love for God and his kingdom far exceeds it. It also means that the Christian has an entirely different set of priorities that the non-Christian will not understand. For example, let's say your non-Christian friends plan a birthday party for your elderly grandmother on Sunday morning right when you normally go to church. I think most of us would say to them: "I'm sorry, but I cannot come. That is the time my God has called me to worship." Many of them might say: but this is your family. How can you not come to this important event? Don't you love your family? The answer, of course, is that you do love your family. It's only that you love God more. That love for God causes offense to your fellow man and makes it look like you don't love them.

We must respond appropriately to the reality of God's kingdom in our midst. Most fundamentally this means that we must humble ourselves in faith. We don't trust in ourselves, our works, our activity, or even our own opinions. We cannot exalt ourselves in the presence of God, nor can we do that in the presence of our fellow man. These are the marks of a true Christian, and one that bears fruit for God's kingdom. It is humility (not mere activity), that is the most crucial characteristic of a child of God. The Pharisees were quite active and "obedient", but they did not love God and were filled with arrogance about themselves. Instead, let us have both obedience and humility that God may be glorified in us.

## #15 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 15

The main theme of Luke 15 is not hard to discern. It contains three stories of varying lengths that contain the keywords “lost” and “found.” These are the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (better known as the “Parable of the Prodigal Son.”

The fundamental message of each is the same, although the differing imagery in each evokes a different response from the hearer and also highlights different aspects of the lost-found dynamic.

Interestingly, Jesus uses the term “lost” to describe the estate of sin and misery. On the one hand, it is something that everybody instinctually understands. As soon as we are aware of ourselves (even as children) we become scared and afraid when we feel lost. Adam and Eve were banished from their garden home after their sin, destined to wander east of Eden. They were lost. But sin is very deceptive. It makes us feel like we are “home” even when we are far from it. Just as Satan deceived Eve to make her think she would become like God in eating the forbidden fruit, so he continues to deceive with the allurements of sin.

Thus, to be lost is to be in sin. To be “found” is to repent. As the passage indicates, repentance is a form of death and resurrection. In it, we die to our sins and come alive to righteousness. This death manifests itself in our hearts and affections through grief for our sin and hatred of it. Life appears in new desires to live for God that are aroused through our turning to God. That is what the father in the story of the Prodigal son states that his repentance son was “dead, but is alive again.”

In addition to the thing that is lost, there is also the one who seeks it out. This is emphasized most clearly in the first two stories, where the shepherd seeks out the sheep and the woman searches for her coin. This is less clear in the story of the Prodigal Son, as in that story the son simply comes to his senses on his own when eating the pods with the pigs. However, the Father does seek out the son when he is still a long way off to welcome him home.

Finally, there is the response of those in the community to the finding of what is lost. The angels of God rejoice in the sinner who repents. The woman rejoices with her friends and

neighbors at the finding of the lost coin. Although the father rejoices in the repentance of his son, his brother does not. He is emblematic of the grumbling Pharisees who are incensed that Jesus is calling tax collectors and sinners to repentance. They are angry, in part, because they have diligently “served” God through a strict regimen of detailed obedience. But what Isaiah said was very true of them: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” They served God, but under compulsion as if he were a taskmaster. They obeyed, but did not adore God.

In many ways, this is the key emphasis of the passage. Joy, not anger, should be our response to the repentance of others. That sounds good, but putting it into practice is difficult. It is beyond human power. Not only did the Pharisees feel they worked harder for God than these wretched sinners, but they were also subject to oppression and abuse by them. To forgive someone who has hurt us is where the rubber of the Christian faith meets the road of suffering. To rejoice in their restoration is still a further step. This joy can only come from Christ. Although he suffered for our sins, he forgave. What is more, he rejoices when his enemies are reconciled to him and become his eternal friends.

It’s no wonder that the hymn writer reflects on this very passage of Scripture when he writes: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”

We are all lost in our sin. Like sheep, we have gone astray. Like unfaithful sons, we have offended our Father. If his forgiveness weren’t enough, he adds to it his joy at the sight of our repentance. Perhaps the most amazing thing is how much fear we still feel when faced with the prospect of repentance. God expresses more joy at our repentance than he did anger at our sin. Let us then never be sluggish in repentance for fear of judgment. But the father who awaits our homecoming is filled with love towards his wayward sons and daughters.





## #16 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 16

The chapter begins with the Parable of the Dishonest Manager. Upon first reading, this parable strikes most Christian readers as somewhat odd in that it draws lessons from dishonest business dealings for life in the kingdom of God.

A key principle of Biblical interpretation is that we must compare Scripture with Scripture. Put differently, we say that the Scripture interprets itself. Practically speaking, this means that less clear passages of Scripture need to be interpreted in light of clearer ones.

In this case, the general point of the parable is to commend a godly "shrewdness" in our dealings with the world (16:8-9). As Jesus elsewhere says, we are to be as shrewd as serpents, but also as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). In the context of Matthew, the famous phrase points to how they are to survive as sheep among wolves. They will have to thread the needle of faith in difficult, compromising, and dangerous circumstances.

An example of this comes from the Apostle Paul in Acts. He exercised shrewdness when he discerned the divisions between the Sadducees and the Pharisees when he stood before them. In a way that was still sincere and honest (innocent as a dove!), he manipulated their theological division for his own preservation (shrew as a serpent!).

In Luke, the same emphasis on "shrewdness in survival" appears. The dishonest manager is about to come under judgment, and shrewdly devises a method of survival for himself after his certain demise.

But Luke also contains an added element that is drawn from the value the world places on earthly riches. Shrewd investors know how to make money when stocks are up, but also when stocks look to be going down. Simple purchases but also short selling characterize the shrewdest investors. Some can supplement their income quite handsomely by buying discounted items at retail or thrift shops and then reselling them on the online marketplace. A great amount of focused energy can be poured into preserving and increasing earthly wealth.

Yet with our spiritual wealth, we sometimes take the opposite approach. God has given us infinitely valuable eternal treasures in the kingdom of God. Yet our efforts to be faithful

stewards of God's gifts are so pitiful we would be ashamed to have our work publicly evaluated. All too often the disconnect between our zeal for earthly things versus our zeal for heavenly things reveals that we may be serving money and not God.

This was definitely the case with the Pharisees, who ridiculed him for these teachings. It is also interesting that Luke includes a statement from Jesus about divorce and remarriage in this context. Concerns about earthly goods become all-consuming when marriages begin to fall apart and they are left to fight over the remnants of the household.

It is also fitting that the chapter concludes with the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Many are confused by the personification of God the Father in the figure of Abraham. The Roman church has used it to promote their abominable idolatry in the worship of the saints. Ironically, the passage contains a direct statement on the absolute division between heaven and hell, thus condemning their imagined third realm of "limbo" or "purgatory." Jesus often spoke in parables and figures of speech that are not taken literally.

The point of the parable is not to give us a basis to speculate about the details of the "afterlife." Instead, it is to remind us that true comfort does not come from the things of this earth, but only in heaven. What is lost or gained in this life is insignificant to what is gained in heaven and lost in hell. The chief concern of our present lives cannot be in how we improve our current station or increase our earthly goods. If God brings us such comforts, we thank him for them and use them to his glory. But our hearts are set on them.

These treasures are held out to us in the proclamation of God's word. That word is sufficient to warn and to assure us of these things. The time of the end will come when the word of salvation will have ceased. Then our fates will be sealed. We must therefore make every effort now to heed that word and live in faith, trusting in the heavenly treasure promised to us in it.

## #17 - Devotional Meditations on Luke 17

Luke 17 is clearly a “teaching” section of the Gospel. If you have a “red letter” Bible, this will immediately jump out at you. In it Jesus makes several comparisons to help us understand the nature of the kingdom of God. Comparison is a basic tool of any good teacher. We can only learn something new by relating it to something we already understand.

In the first teaching, Jesus compares the danger of sin to the dangers of earthly calamities. It would be better if a millstone were hung around our necks and we were cast into the sea than to even be the occasion for someone else to sin. Think about that for a minute: when was the last time you were even mildly upset that you had some part to play in the sins of others? I'm am sure a few of us have sensitive enough consciences to wrestle with this thought. But if you are like me you are probably struggling to think of a single time in recent memory. The earthly calamities we face are nothing compared to the dangers of sin. In fact, it is better for us to experience them if it means we will avoid promoting sin. Earthly calamity can lead to the death of the body. Sin leads to the second death of both body and soul in hell.

Sin is overcome through Christ, and that is manifested in our lives through repentance and forgiveness. That is really hard work. No one naturally wants to acknowledge they have done wrong. No one wants to forgive others who have hurt them and sinned against them. But if we don't we remain in the devil's snare and are captive to his kingdom. There is no comparing the difficulty of repentance and forgiveness to slavery in his kingdom.

The next comparison is between the smallness of faith and the greatness of its fruits. Faith as small as a mustard seed is more powerful than a tree grown through natural powers.

After this comes the parable of the unworthy servants. Here Jesus compares the valuelessness of our works as servants to the glory and majesty of God, our master. Neither the quality nor quantity of our works is anywhere near in value to the infinite majesty of God. There can be no merit between God and his creatures even as there is no comparison between the value of God's works and ours.

In the parable of the Ten Lepers, Jesus heals them all but only one returns to Christ to thank him for his healing (a Samaritan!). Here the comparison lies in the radically different reactions of this single man and the other nine. In this, we have another implicit comparison: between

the greatness of the blessedness of God's kingdom and the meagerness of our response. How often are we like the other nine, taking God's blessings and quickly forgetting their source? Even if our hearts are rightly thankful for God's good gift of salvation, what is that in itself? God's accepting thankfulness as an adequate response to his grace is itself an act of grace. God doesn't need our thankfulness. Even on the human level, saying "thank you" takes almost no effort and (most of the time) has little monetary or emotional value.

That is, in part, why God requires thankfulness of us. It is a reminder that both salvation itself and our response to it are the products of God's grace.

That is why our response to God starts with faith. Faith does not look to ourselves, but to Christ. Faith does not boast in our accomplishments, but in God. In a word, faith underscores that there is no comparison between us and God or his work and ours.

Luke 18 is a chapter filled with interactions that illustrate the contrast between members of the kingdom and those outside of it.

The persistent widow interacts with the unjust judge. He has a position of authority to administer justice to the people. "Justice" here is not to be understood in the more recent (neo-)Marxist sense of revolutionary overthrow of power structures through human power. This is fundamentally rebellion against God and the order that he has providentially established.

Instead, "justice" is to live in a place governed by the righteousness of God. God's law requires that we love our neighbor as ourselves. The great test of this is in how we deal with the vulnerable and weak (like the widow).

The widow looks for justice from those appointed to give it, and she receives none. But because of her persistent interaction with him, he finally gives it to her to make her stop bothering him.

The point of the parable is simple and clear: if persistence can extract justice from an uncaring, unjust judge, how much more will persistent prayer bring speedy justice from God to those who look to him in faith. The nature of the kingdom is illustrated in interactions.

Next comes the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The interactions here are more complex, involving the Pharisee, the Tax Collector, and the Lord.

The Pharisee's attitude and interactions are both man-centered self-centered. He is chiefly concerned with man and how he measures up to others. This is a sinful human tendency that can manifest itself in different ways. Sometimes we measure ourselves by others and fall short of their gifts, status, beauty, strength, and/or intelligence. This makes us grow jealous, bitter, envious, withdrawn, and angry. The other way involves comparing ourselves to others to whom we feel superior in all these categories. This leads to arrogance, pride, a grandiose sense of self, and an attitude that despises others. Both are equally self-centered and man-centered even they differ widely in their expression.

The Pharisee is of the latter variety. He speaks of "God" but only with his lips--his heart is far from him. He deflects his own unrighteousness by measuring himself by the tax collector. He has created a few "hoops" of righteousness that must be jumped through in order to attain a superior moral status. The Tax Collector hasn't jumped through them, so he remains beneath him.

The Tax Collector is quite different. His prayer only mentions two people: God and him. God is characterized by mercy, he is characterized by sin. That's it. End of story. He is so overwhelmed by his own unrighteousness he has no words to speak of the unrighteousness of others.

The Pharisee stands by himself, head high, separated from others. The Tax collector hangs himself low, humbled to the dust. The Pharisees (relatively speaking) gives a long prayer to be heard by others. The Tax Collector speaks with brevity and sincerity of his sin and need for forgiveness.

## #18 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 18:1-43

Luke's Gospel is written in the form of a travel narrative. Jesus is on a journey to Jerusalem to accomplish redemption. He is sojourning to a destination marked by suffering and death. There is good reason for Luke's decision to craft his narrative in this way. The Book of Acts, which serves as a companion volume to this Gospel, is also a travel narrative. It records the journey of the apostolic proclamation from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Along the way, both Jesus and the Apostles experience suffering and trial. But in both, we see plenty of encouragement and support to sustain us on our way. Our lives in Christ are also a journey. We sojourn our earth and do battle against spiritual foes, but through Christ receive everything needful that we might reach our destination.

Luke 18 contains much encouragement for pilgrim sojourners. It begins with the parable of the Persistent Widow. Its basic point is to encourage us to always pray and not lose heart. The journey is difficult. We will often be faced with troubles that lead us to fatigue and even despair. It is written in the form of an argument that can be called "from the lesser to the greater." The idea is that if something is true in one situation, it will be more true in a greater situation. Specifically, the argument is this: an unjust judge who cares nothing for righteousness will answer a persistent widow simply to remove the annoyance of her constant requests. How much more will a just judge who loves his people bring speedy help to his beloved children! God at times chooses not to answer us immediately. This might give us the impression that he does not care for us. If someone cares, why would they take so long to get to us? Jesus reassures us that God does care. Even his delay is an expression of this care, for he uses it as a means to increase and purify our faith (18:8). In both his answers and in his delays he works to protect his people. Prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us. It not only glorifies God and ensures that all the glory goes to him, but it also brings us comfort and hope in our often treacherous pilgrim journey.

After this is the famous parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (i.e., Publican). It is one of the clearest expressions in the entire Bible of the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works. It also provides irrefutable evidence that the Jews had indeed perverted God's law into a form of salvation by works--a notion that has been challenged in our day by movements like the "New Perspective on Paul."

Note the contrast developed in the parable. The Pharisees trust in themselves for righteousness. The tax collector, by contrast, puts no hope in his "good works" (for he has none). The Pharisee leaves the temple humbled and condemned, while the Pharisee goes home

"justified" before God (i.e. declared righteous). The fact that they are in the Temple is highly significant, for this was not simply the place of prayer, but also sacrifice. The tax collector trusted in God's "propitiation" for his sins, not in his good works. This is the very Greek word he uses in verse 13 usually translated "...be merciful to me." His trust is therefore in Christ the final sacrifice, not in his obedience.

Many other contrasts reinforce this point. The Pharisee prays "by" or "to" himself as he stands proudly before God and men. The tax collector will not even raise his eyes to heaven. For a show the Pharisee makes a long prayer, listing his numerous acts of obedience, even contrasting them to the sins of others around him. The tax collector knows that he will not be heard for his many words. Standing far off, he offers a short, simple prayer (only six words in the Greek): "God be merciful to me a sinner" (18:13). With respect to justification, what more is there to say to God except: "Lord, I only have sin from which I need to be forgiven."

On this journey, we can often be afflicted in conscience by our sins. There is no escape from the presence of sin in this life. We will sometimes be haunted by our past failures. At other times the devil will stir up voices of accusation and condemnation to discourage us and move us to lose heart. What an encouragement this story is for sinful pilgrims. Christ has forgiven them when they were his enemies. Having now become his friends, will he not continue to forgive, reassure, and help them on their way?

After this, we read of Jesus welcoming little children to himself. This passage is often referenced in discussions about God's covenant promise to the children of Christian families. It is often read when infant children are presented for baptism. What a beautiful and gracious thing that God and Christ welcome our little children and count them as his own!

Spiritually speaking, this passage also refers to the character of every believer. In order to enter the kingdom we must humble ourselves and become like little children. This means we must be willing to be retaught everything from the perspective of the kingdom of heaven.

Children are usually pretty willing to learn. They carry with them at all times the realization that they are not able to do the things adults are able to do. As sinners, we are proud and lose this sense of childlike humility and willingness to learn. It is with good reason that the next passage deals with a rich young ruler who is struggling with this very thing.

As a rich man, he has the earthly marks of success. People tend to look at the wealthy and associate them with mastery and success. In his case, there was some reason for people to make this conclusion. He was both righteous and rich. The OT Scriptures did hold out the promise of long life and earthly wealth for those who walked in God's commandments, especially connected to the Theocracy and the blessedness of the Promised Land.

Although formally he looked like he had things "figured out," Jesus makes it clear that there was one thing he still lacked. If we think that Jesus's main point is that the rich young ruler had to take a vow of poverty, we are missing the point. This external act was to be evidence of a deeper reality of his heart. His problem was that his conception of the kingdom was earthly. His treasure was on earth, where moth and rust destroy. Instead, he was to have treasure in heaven. Indeed, Jesus makes it clear that those who have wealth have "more to lose" on the earthly level when presented with the eternal, invisible realities of the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom. Jesus neither absolutely condemns wealth for the Christian, nor does he absolutely bind us to vows of poverty. Instead, we must see earthly possessions as a means to promote God's heavenly purposes. Whatever earthly loss we experience for Christ's sake, he will more than replace it in the age to come.

(As an aside, I think the reason for the command to sell everything had to do with his personal situation. He was so in love with his riches that the only way to move his heart to love eternal things above earthly ones was for him to entirely free himself from them. It is not an absolute rule for every person at all times but specific to his situation.)

In fact, Jesus himself embodied this principle of experiencing the loss of all earthly things for the sake of the kingdom of God. The next passage reminds us of this in another prediction of his future sufferings and exaltation in Jerusalem. Jesus does not call us to anything he was not first willing to do himself!

Yet the disciples still don't grasp the significance of this prediction, even as we are often blinded by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. It is not insignificant, therefore, that the chapter ends with the story of the healing of a blind man. It gives concrete expression to the core problem of every disciple and the struggle of every sinner: we do not see Jesus and his kingdom clearly. Sometimes we are flat-out blind.



But Jesus comes in grace to open our eyes. Interestingly, this blind man is an impoverished beggar. In contrast to the rich young ruler he has nothing and is capable of earning nothing for himself. What a perfect mirror for our own spiritual condition. Like the tax collector, he has no righteousness to claim. His only words are a plea for mercy (38). Like the persistent widow, he asks continually even when the disciples command that he be silent (39). Indeed, many of the themes of the entire passage intersect in the story of this blind man. Although the disciples turn him away, Jesus welcomes this beggar who comes to him like a little child. He grants him his request, and he follows Jesus along the way.

And how do these merciful acts of healing, forgiveness, and encouragement come? They come by faith in Jesus through the word of his power. We no longer walk physically with Jesus to an earthly destination. Our journey is spiritual. It is not from Galilee to Jerusalem. It is a journey from earth to heaven. There are many perils along the way. We experience the fatigue of trials. The deceitfulness of riches can avert our attention. But our faithful Savior will come to further open our eyes to see clearly the greatness of the kingdom of God so that we might always follow Jesus along the way.

## #19 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 19:1-48

In the last chapter, Jesus emphasized the need for humility in order to enter God's kingdom. Christ himself was the glorious king of all, yet he became a suffering servant to inaugurate God's kingdom. Through faith and the Holy Spirit, we must become like him to enter it. We must embody the pattern of the tax collector, the little children that come to Jesus, and the blind beggar in Luke 18. We must come to Christ weak, impoverished, sinful, and blind. Christ will exalt us and give us all that we need.

Luke 19 continues this earlier theme by opening with the story of Zaccheus. Like the young ruler in the earlier passage, Zaccheus is very rich. Unlike him, Zaccheus gained his wealth through questionable means. The ruler is "righteous" while Zaccheus is notorious in unrighteousness as the "chief" tax collector.

Luke is deliberately contrasting these two figures. The rich young ruler so loved his wealth it kept him from having treasure in heaven. Zaccheus so loved Jesus that he was willing to freely give half of all that he had in his joy that the kingdom had come. The rich ruler went away from Jesus "sad" because he had great wealth. Zaccheus receives Jesus joyfully and gladly gives it away. The ruler never believed he was spiritually lost as his "success" had blinded him to spiritual things. Jesus comes to seek and to save the lost, and Zaccheus is clearly among this number. Like the earlier parable, the "Pharisee" ruler trusts in himself, but the tax collector goes home justified before God. Like Father Abraham, he believed in the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness.

We get a small narrative-hint of Zaccheus's faith and willingness to undergo humiliation in the details about his small stature (he was pretty short). This great and wealthy man has to climb up a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus over the crowd. I'm sure he experienced some wisecracks over the years regarding his height. It's no fun to have others make fun of physical characteristics over which you have no control. Zaccheus was so desirous to welcome Jesus that he was willing to face such potential humiliation. The humble will be exalted!

Next Luke records the Parable of the Ten Minas. The subject matter shifts from the characteristics of those who will enter the kingdom to the timing of its coming. Both then and now there are those that are struck by Jesus's statements on the "nearness" of God's kingdom. Many have made the mistake of thinking that Jesus meant this in a woodenly literal fashion and that Christ taught that the final end would come within the lifetime of the apostles. While there

is a provisional fulfillment that appears in Jesus and during the apostolic era, the NT makes clear that a significant amount of time will intervene between the first and second comings of Christ.

In the parable, this is illustrated in a number of details. The "nobleman" who goes away to a far country represents Christ in his heavenly ascension who awaits a return. The command he gives to his servants to engage in business while he away reiterates the longer time frame. Indeed, a theme in the Gospel of Luke is to warn against the temptation of spiritual complacency. Just as a worker's productivity will sometimes diminish without proper supervision from the business owner, so also our sense that Christ coming is far off may lead us to impious procrastination. The passage is an encouragement to us to be about our Master's work. After all, he is truly not far from any of us. Spiritual lethargy is not necessarily a definitive sign that one is not truly a Christian. Sometimes it is due to fatigue and the effect of great trial. In these moments Christ brings his compassion and love to strengthen us. But other times can sometimes be a symptom of a deeper problem, even a lack of true faith in ultimate things.

Indeed, Christ's kingdom is about to be inaugurated, but the end is not yet. His servants must be prepared for the "long haul."

This is especially noteworthy given that Luke next proceeds to the Triumphal Entry. Every part of this passage is a revelation that Christ is God's king and that his kingdom has arrived. He is in Jerusalem, the city of the great king. He is near the Mount of Olives, an important location in the life of God's king, David. He gives his disciples a command with his royal authority. He commandeers a colt with authority only a king could possess. He gives himself the title "Lord," a designation fit for a king. The people directly proclaim him to be king, fulfilling the prophetic words of Psalm 118:26.

In this, Luke's record shares much in common with the other Gospels. What is striking are the things that Luke leaves under the surface. Unlike Matthew, Luke makes no direct reference to the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 which draws attention to the humble character of Christ in the coming of his kingdom. This is the problem with the disciples and with many who stumble over Christ and his kingdom. They want Christ to be a victorious leader who will only bring improvement to their earthly lives. They want earthly exaltation from him, not humiliation. Yet even Christ came to humble himself so that he might become the savior of sinners.

Although the Triumphal Entry reminds us that Jesus is a great king, Luke's record contains a "hidden" humiliation in that he makes his triumphal entrance through a lowly donkey. This is

not the typical ride for royalty. The one for whom they declare "glory in the highest" takes the lowliest form of transportation for his journey.

What an ominous preview of an even more humiliating means of his transport from earth to heaven. The vehicle he must take to be translated from earth to heaven is the cruel death of the cross. Having thus humbled himself, he will also be exalted in resurrection at God's right hand.

This pattern found in Christ's life is to be replicated in our lives as well. Dying with Jesus we will also rise with him. Suffering with Christ we shall also be exalted in him. Humbling ourselves in our Savior we shall be exalted by his power.

Humiliation will come one way or another. We will either freely embrace it for our salvation, or it shall be forced upon us in eternal destruction. The former brings joy in heaven--when even one sinner repents. Jesus's weeping over Jerusalem shows that Christ will not take a positive delight in even the death of the wicked. Although our wicked hearts stumble over these things, Christ will come and cleanse them even as he cleanses the Temple to purify his people's worship.

Let us then embrace freely and fully the pattern of self-humiliation we see in our savior. By confessing our sins, we will have forgiveness. Embracing the shame of the world, we will have the honor of God. When we humble ourselves under his mighty hand, he will exalt us in due time.

## #20 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 20:1-47

"Show me the man and I will show you the crime!" This statement is sometimes attributed to Joseph Stalin, although it appears to have been uttered by Lavrentiy Beria, who was the longtime head of Stalin's secret police. The idea is that because everybody has some dirt in their past, you only need to spend some time digging before you can discover questionable material in their past. In the case of the political class in a corrupt country, there will likely be laundry lists of chargeable offenses if you just look hard enough.

But even if the person's record and character are squeaky clean, legal accusations and charges can still be an effective weapon against your enemy. False accusations stir up suspicion and can taint the reputation of even the purest persons. Even if they are acquitted in the end, great damage can be done. The legal process is stressful and grueling. It can be easily perverted from an instrument of justice to a weapon of destruction.

In this passage, we see the chief priests and the scribes do this very thing against Jesus. He is "squeaky clean" as far as his legal record is concerned. So they will attempt to set traps for him to catch him in his words. When this fails they will outright lie and bring false charges as a pretense to put him to death. This chapter begins the record of these efforts.

The first attempt goes for the jugular and attacks the root and basis of Jesus's authority. The question is designed to put him on the horns of a dilemma. If he claims the direct authority of God, he could be charged with subverting their leadership as elders. Further, they could charge him with blasphemy (which they later do!). In this they can also cause trouble for him with the Roman authorities, accusing him of insurrection and rebellion (which they also later do!).

Jesus's answer turns the table on the Jewish leaders. He pivots by turning the question to the subject of John the Baptist. While the verdict is still out on Jesus, all the people accept that John was a prophet of God. Jesus knows that they have a nakedly political mindset, and exposes it with a question that puts them in a bind. Like modern politicians who always know when they can't give a popular answer to a good question, they simply refuse to answer. So Jesus also refuses to tell them by what authority he does these things. Yet by forcing a non-answer, Jesus indirectly reveals that he is operating with the wisdom of God which is greater than man.

Next comes the parable of the Wicked Tenants. The context makes it very clear that this parable is spoken against the Jewish leaders. God had sent OT Israel servant after servant to bring his word to the people and cultivate spiritual fruit among them. Yet year after year they rejected these servants, persecuting and attacking them. Finally, God sent John as the forerunner, and he was put to death. After that, he sent his only Son, whom they killed in order to steal the inheritance. The parable ends on a note of judgment: "He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others" (20:16). This is met with resistance by the Jewish leaders. They believe they are God's irrevocably chosen people. Citing Psalm 118:22, Jesus identifies himself as the cornerstone of God's house which will be rejected by the builders. Not only is judgment coming upon them for their rejection of God, but this whole matter had also been prophesied ahead of time.

Ironically, although they reject the claim that God will reject them, they continue to actively work to reject Jesus. In the next passage, they change tactics and try to catch him in his words. They craft another question designed to place him on the horns of a dilemma. Whatever way he answers, it is designed to cause him trouble. In other words, the question is not sincere. It is a vicious attack hidden under the veil of a curious inquiry. Like their father, the devil, they are crafty with their questions.

The famous question focuses on the subject of taxation. In general, no one likes to pay taxes, and no one likes to hear that they are legally obligated to pay them. This is all the more the case when the authorities to whom the taxes are paid are corrupt and out to destroy your people. If Jesus affirms their obligation to pay taxes, he will run afoul of the Jewish people. If Jesus says that they are not required to pay them, the Roman authorities may accuse him of rebellion.

Jesus's answer not only threads this needle, but turns the table on his interrogators. Taking a Roman coin he asks them regarding the likeness and inscription on the obverse and states: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (20:25).

This statement does several amazing things simultaneously. First, it acknowledges the rightful sphere of civil government while also limiting its scope. Caesar has things that are entrusted to him, but not everything. There is a realm that remains "God's" over which he is not to transgress.

Secondly, it also exposes the earthly-mindedness of the Jews more generally and their conception of the kingdom of God more particularly. They tend to view the Messiah and God's

coming kingdom in earthly-political terms. Rome would be overthrown and they would have their Messianic kingdom in which they would have a chief place. Jesus reminds them that God's kingdom is of a different character and is spiritual in nature. As the rest of the NT indicates, we live our lives in this world as sojourning citizens of heaven.

Jesus's answer blasts through the horns of their dilemma and leaves them silent marveling at the wisdom of God in him.

Next, the Sadducees take a turn. While the Pharisees and the Sadducees were at odds theologically and religiously, they identified a common enemy in Jesus. The Sadducees only accepted the Books of Moses as authoritative Scripture and also rejected the supernatural and the spiritual (i.e. no resurrection, no angels, no spirits [Acts 23:8]). Their question naturally flows out of their distinctive theological commitments.

The dilemma they raise comes out of an OT provision for the "levirate marriage." The idea was that if a man's brother dies, he was obligated to marry his widow. For obvious reasons, the idea sounds strange to us today. It is also worth noting that this was a temporary provision that is no longer in force today. But its purpose was primarily for the widow. Rather than be left destitute she was to be provided for. That general principle still remains a Christian obligation for God's people, although the form in which it is expressed has changed.

The Sadducees argue that the levirate marriage makes nonsense of the whole idea of resurrection. If a person can lawfully have multiple spouses in this life through death and remarriage, how will this get all sorted out in the age to come?

As with the Pharisees, Jesus exposes their earthly-mindedness of a different kind. In the resurrection and the world to come a great transformation will have occurred. We are not married or given in marriage, but become like the angels of God. Even Moses affirmed the reality of the resurrection, which Jesus proves by appealing to the passage of the burning bush. This is significant because the Sadducees only accepted the Books of Moses. Yet even Moses speaks against them!

The Sadducees attempted to expose the inescapable contradictions of belief in the resurrection. But Jesus left them exposed in their contradictory commitment to Moses even while they reject his teaching.

The passage thus demonstrates Christ's divine authority and wisdom. The very thing challenged in the first part of the passage is declared to be established by the end. Jesus is David's son but also David's Lord. He will vanquish all his foes: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool" (Luke 20:43).

Ironically, Jesus's enemies turn out to be the Jewish leaders themselves. The very ones appointed to shepherd God's people in faith in the Messiah turn to attack him. In this passage, they fail to land him in their traps. But shortly they will succeed in his trial and crucifixion. Yet even then Jesus ironically succeeds in conquering his and our real enemies. On the cross, he defeats the devil. In his death he destroys sin. In defeat, he brings victory and enters into the resurrection which the Sadducees rejected, and the spiritual Kingdom the Pharisees so misunderstood.

Jesus is our king. With his wisdom we can thread the needle of the spiritual dilemmas we face in this life. Whatever opposition comes our way we know that the kingdom and glory of Christ are certain and can never be taken away.



## #21 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 21:1-38

Luke 21 is an interesting mix of the cosmic and the personal. The chapter begins and ends with direct statements commending and warning in personal ways.

He begins by contrasting the poor widow with the wealthy Jewish scribes. The scribes are condemned in 20:45 in part because they "devour widow's houses." In 21:3 Jesus commends the widow for the proportional greatness of her gift. The wealthy give a portion out of their abundance, but the widow gives everything out of her poverty. The Greek refers to more than just her money. It tells that she gave her "whole life [bios]." The money was a pledge of her very self and substance.

The Bible thus evaluates our giving by a principle of proportionality. Our generosity is not measured by the size of the gift, but by its proportion to our income. This is the best economic measure of the heart. In contrast to the rich young ruler, although poor she gives away all she has because of the heavenly treasure in her heart.

Likewise, the passage ends with a personal warning to the disciples against the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches (21:34-36). The warning recalls the seed that fell among thorns in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:14) We must always be awake and watchful, wary of how earthly cares can choke out God's word.

What blessedness the widow had to be freed from all such earthly preoccupations. She was left with nothing on earth. But her heart was filled with the joy and anticipation of heaven.

Thus the passage pointedly addresses us personally.

But in the middle, it also addresses us historically. Luke 21 contains Jesus's famous "Olivet Discourse" in which he predicts the destruction of the Temple as well as several aspects of what will occur at the end of the world.

This passage is a difficult one to interpret, and we lack space in a devotional to get into all the details. Nevertheless, it seems fairly clear that Jesus is utilizing a technique seen in the OT

referred to as "prophetic foreshortening." This means that as Jesus peers into the future, some events begin to blend together. It is like what happens when you look out at the stars at night, or even the sun and moon during the day. Both the sun and moon appear to be the same size and distance, even the former is much farther away. The stars also look as if they are similar distances from the earth. This is due to "foreshortening," where objects off in the distance blend together.

In this passage, the events that blend together are the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and the final end of all things. The fact that the destruction of the Temple contains elements that preview the end of the world makes the blending even stronger. The one is a type of the other.

The general point from Jesus is that this world will not continue as it is forever. One day judgment will come. It may take a while, but we must always keep watch and stay awake. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the word of Christ will never pass away. Historically or personally, our earthly time is short and our days are number. If we have no faith, destruction will come upon us like a flood. If we are prepared we await the end with joy, knowing that our redemption is drawing nigh. By God's grace, we will pray and have the strength to escape all these things and stand before the Son of man.

## #22 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 22:39-71

One key theme of the chapter is the Biblical connection between promise and fulfillment in Christ. What God's word declares will most certainly come to pass. In the last section, Luke went out of his way to point out how Christ brought the promises of the OT to fulfillment in himself and his sufferings. Jesus told us that his sufferings had "been determined" by God and previously revealed in the Scriptures (23:22). Later he declares that the "Scripture must be fulfilled in me" (22:37).

In the abstract, this is a fairly neutral thought. We can easily contemplate God's divine wisdom and plan, even marveling at its infinitely glorious character. But when we consider it in the concrete--especially in connection to our predetermined sufferings in Christ--it is not always an easy thought to stomach.

Interestingly, the passage indicates that not only will the OT Scriptures be fulfilled in Christ, but so also Christ's own predictions about his sufferings. The first part of the chapter opens with various predictions about his sufferings, all of which come to pass. The chief priests and scribes plot to put him to death and their plan comes to fruition (22:2). Satan enters into Judas and plots to betray him. His plan is later exactly executed and Jesus is betrayed with a kiss. Although these predictions come from Luke as the narrator, they were previously foretold by Jesus himself (22:21).

Other elements of the story are also known ahead of time by Christ and predicted by him to the disciples. The details of the Passover meal are communicated to the disciples, including where it will be held. When the disciples do as Jesus says Luke tells us that "they went and found it just as he had told them" (22:13). Jesus's words come to pass. Peter's threefold denial of Christ is predicted directly to him, along with his later restoration. Both events come to pass just as Jesus had said (22:54-62). Jesus later ratifies the direct prediction with a direct gaze at Peter at the moment of his denial (22:61). I am sure that look was burned within his memory! Peter would never forget that Christ's words will come to fulfillment!

The same things can be said regarding his being mocked by the men holding him in custody, and his rejection by the elders, chief priests, and scribes. All these things were previously predicted by Jesus (9:22).

Do you see the point? It is not simply that Christ can predict the future. It's that Christ knows that the earthly future ahead of him is filled with suffering and trial. It is no wonder that it is at this point in the narrative that we read of Jesus's agonizing prayer on the Mount of Olives. Aware of all that must certainly come to pass in God's plan he still prays: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (22:42). With anxiety so great he sweat drops of blood, God sent his angel to minister to him. Although he was God he was also a true man. He wrestled with the horrible prospect of his future sufferings and even resorted to prayer to express his earnest dread of what certainly lay before him.

Having undergone his sufferings and death, he became our Passover Lamb. He died in our place, paying a debt we could never pay. But in this experience of patiently and willingly enduring suffering according to God's known plan, he becomes an example and source of power for us. Hebrews tells us that Christ's sufferings and temptations allowed him to become a merciful High Priest, giving him sympathy with us in our weakness. He came from among men so that "he can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness" (Heb. 5:2).

We, therefore, see in him not merely a "bare" example we can follow in our own strength. Vitally united to him by faith and the Holy Spirit, we draw upon the power of his sympathy and victory to endure the trials set before us.

Christ has told us ahead of time that these trials will come. They are inevitable. Even as we might be filled with anxiety over the unknown future, we can be comforted that he wrestled with the same things. But having overcome death he became the source of eternal salvation to all who would believe in him.

All of our days are planned ahead of time. Every day that was ordained for me was written in your book before one of them came to be. We don't know all the details. We do know that the road will be narrow and hard. Christ has gone before us. He is our forerunner. We can be certain that even as we share in his sufferings we shall also share in his glory.

## #23-A - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 23:1-25

There is no greater injustice than the condemnation of the innocent. How many of you have heard stories of convicted criminals serving life sentences only to have their convictions overturned by DNA evidence that exonerates them? The joy of their newfound freedom and vindication is moving and heart-warming. But the thought of them losing large portions of their life to a wrongful conviction is heartbreaking. To be sure, it is also wrong to allow the guilty to go unpunished. But there is a reason we adopt the principle "innocent until proven guilty."

Luke 23 moves from the betrayal and denial of Jesus to his trial before Herod and Pontius Pilate. They are the formal legal authorities established by God for the preservation of justice (see Romans 13). During this part of the narrative two key things are clearly established: the innocence of Jesus and the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders.

The accusations against our Savior are serious. They are also fabricated and false. Before Pilate Jesus is charged with lying to the nation, encouraging the people not to pay taxes, and establishing himself as a rival king to Caesar. These are either blatantly false (as in the case of taxation) or a serious distortion of his teaching (i.e. his kingship over against Roman rule). Later they add the charge that he promotes insurrection (23:5).

Pilate can already see through the Jewish charade and tries to "pass the buck" to Herod. Since Jesus was from Galilee, Herod would have original jurisdiction over the matter. Ironically, pagan Pilate is more concerned for a just legal process than the Jewish leaders who were entrusted with God's law. Herod is pleased to have Jesus before him, hoping to see some "magic tricks." He listened to the accusations, but when Jesus did not answer he mocked him and sent him back to Herod. The true mockery was against himself as one called to administer justice.

Pilate's preliminary investigation clearly revealed that the charges against Jesus were weak at best and fabricated at worst. No less than three times Pilate undoubtedly declares his innocence: "I find no guilt in this man" (23:4); "...I do not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him" (23:14); "I have found in him no guilt deserving of death" (23:22).

Jesus was our sinless Savior. There was not a single time he transgressed God's law and did what God had forbidden. He had also perfectly kept the positive precepts of the law. As our

sinless Savior, he is qualified to be the spotless Lamb of God who can bear our sins. He bore our sins because he had none of his own to bear.

In contrast to the innocence of Jesus, the text highlights the evil hypocrisy of the Jews. They charge Jesus with stirring up insurrection, but they wanted nothing more than the overthrow of Roman rule. They falsely charge him with insurrection but demand the release of Barabbas (an insurrectionist) instead of Jesus. The Jewish leaders sit in the seat of divine justice, but administer gross injustice to the very one who gave them the law in days of old.

Here we see a pattern of suffering that will be true in us even as it was true in Jesus. It is not uncommon for humans to embrace suffering provided it is for a good cause and there is some earthly good that comes from it. Modern psychology will even speak of how essential it is for human development to embrace the idea of self-denial in the present for a delayed benefit in the future. While there is an element of truth in this, it falls woefully short of the Christian's calling.

It is not simply that the Christian will do good and not be thanked or noticed for it. Nor does the essence of the Christian life consist in doing good while suffering (in the abstract). Suffering becomes distinctly "Christian" in the fullest sense when while doing good we suffer as if we were evildoers. Nothing is more painful or maddening to do the right thing and be punished as if we were doing wrong. We instinctually know this even when we are young children. How often do children decry the injustice of being falsely accused by a sibling who was actually the one causing the trouble in the moment?

Indeed, Christ himself endured these things. He calls us to do the same.

But how? When all earthly safeguards to protect us from injustice fail, we can appeal to a greater judge in heaven. Peter tells us that Christ bore these sufferings patiently looking to his Father in heaven:

"For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly... For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (1 Pet. 2:19, 21-23)

To be sure, the Christian life is not only about suffering. He often gives us seasons of rest and refreshment where we experience the blessing of God in both earthly and heavenly things. But days of trial and injustice will most certainly come. Nothing will scrape more painfully against our souls than the knife of injustice while seeking to honor God. It is at these very moments that our faith in God is most tested. Like Job, we must stare down the accusation of Satan: "Does Job serve God for no purpose?...[Take away] all he has and he will surely curse you to your face" (Job 1:11).

But we are not among those who curse him while suffering unjustly. With Jesus and Job, we bless our Father! He may give, and he may take away, but blessed be the name of the Lord.

## #23-B - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 23:26-56

The call of Jesus to his disciples is loud and clear: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Self-denial is therefore of the essence of the Christian life. Among the Gospel writers, Luke adds the words "daily" to make it clear that Jesus does not have in view a literal cross-bearing. Nor does he see a life of self-denial accomplished in major acts of service punctuating the span of our life now and then. Instead, the call to follow Christ is a daily one and evidences a heart orientation filled with the greatness and glory of God and the constant mindset that we are living sacrifices of thanks to him.

In Luke 23, we see this life pattern of selfless service come to its culmination in the crucifixion of Jesus. When his sufferings reach their peak, so also does his love and concern for others. Paul commends to us an attitude of humility in which we put the concerns of others ahead of ourselves (Phil. 2:3). Although he was in the form of God he took the form of a servant in his incarnation and humbled himself to the point of death (Phil. 2:5-8). What Paul teaches us in a practical-theological meditation Luke portrays in narrative form.

Interestingly the crucifixion of Jesus is preceded by the mention of Simon of Cyrene. Upon him the cross of Jesus is laid that he might carry it behind him. This historical detail has practical significance. Luke has clearly taught us that Christ is our Passover Lamb. In this, he is a substitute who died in our place. But he is also our example (see 1 Pet. . The Christ who embraced suffering for our sakes also calls us to embrace suffering in him. Simon is a concrete picture of the Christian's call to take up the cross and follow Christ--in this case, quite literally!

But notice further how the details of the narrative exemplify this pattern of self-denial for the sake of others. Nearly every detail demonstrates how Christ subordinated his own needs to those of others. First, as the women following him mourn and lament for him, he redirects their concern to others: "...do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (23:28). Jesus's words seem to refer to the future destruction of the Temple and the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD. When unjust judgment comes upon Jesus his sadness is directed towards a just judgment that will come upon others. God does not delight in the death of the wicked. Earlier Jesus wept as Jerusalem rejected its Savior. Now before his cross, he weeps not for himself but for his crucifiers. What selfless grace to sinners!

Second, we see the same selflessness expressed in his interactions with the criminals. This scene occurs in direct fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant of the Lord: "...he



poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors" (Is. 53:12). It is one thing to be falsely accused. It is another to be grouped among the wicked. If we were in this situation, we would probably expend our energy decrying the injustice of the situation. Our final breaths would consist of complaints about ourselves rather than a concern for others.

But behold the selfless grace of Christ! Instead of advocating for himself, the innocent intercedes for the guilty: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing" (23:34). Likewise he declares to the criminal who confessed his name: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (23:43).

The mocking shouts of the rulers ironically underscore this expression of Christ's selfless love: "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, the chosen one" (23:35; cf. 23:37). Although they mean it for evil, God ordained that they would speak these words for good. They are a reminder that Christ freely chose not to save himself so that he might be the sin-bearer and Savior of others.

Christ thus completed his course of cross-bearing, fully manifesting his selfless love for our salvation. After the sun's light failed and the way to heaven was opened, he spoke one last word to God: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (23:46). A life of selfless love can only be lived when our minds are focused on God, looking to him for strength and grace with an eye to his glory.

After being laid in the grave and resting according to God's word, Christ's cry would be answered on the third day when he would be raised in glory.

There is no doubt that Christ died for us and in our place. He was our substitute and paid a debt that we could never pay and died a death we could never die. Only the God-man could be our sin-bearer. But having received this gift of righteousness by faith, Christ-for-us also become Christ-in-us. In our justification, we grasp Christ as our substitute. In our sanctification, we follow Christ as our example. Both are accomplished by grace, but both are present in the life of the believer. They are distinct but cannot be separated. They are the twin graces we receive by faith in union with our Savior.

Being therefore the beneficiaries of Christ's selfless, sacrificial love, let us then have this same mind in ourselves. Let us not pursue great acts of service to be noticed by others--much less to

earn anything from God. Instead, let us take up this cross daily as we follow Christ. In each small moment let us recognize an opportunity to have his love expressed through us. Let us do this especially when those around us do not deserve it, that the mind of Christ may be made complete in us.

## #24 - Devotional Meditations on the Gospel of Luke 24:1-53

During Jesus's crucifixion, Luke tells us that the "sun's light failed." Earth's brightest star received its light from the Son of God when life came into the universe. On the cross, the Creator died in human flesh. Just as the sun went dark over the land of Egypt just preceding the death of the firstborn, so now the sun's light fails during the death of God's firstborn. The whole scene is dark, indeed! It is filled with suffering, pain, agony, and sorrow.

But in Luke 24 the darkness of death gives way to rays of resurrection light. It is not as if this light was not revealed earlier. As Luke reminds us through the words of the angels, we must remember that Jesus predicted both his sufferings and resurrection while he was still in Galilee (24:6-7). The darkness was not due to the absence of God's light but to the fact that the disciples' eyes were blind. If our eyes are closed we cannot see, no matter how brightly the sun may shine.

Yet the opening of their eyes comes slowly. When we wake up in the morning, we often need to take some time to adjust. We rub our eyelids to help them open. We don't turn the bright lights on right away but allow our pupils to slowly adjust to the daylight. So also with the disciples when they behold Jesus's resurrection. When the women find the stone rolled away at Jesus's tomb and see the angels where his body had lain Luke tells us that "they were perplexed about this" (24:4). When the apostles heard the report, their words "seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (24:11).

The memorable story of the meeting of Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus contains the same emphases. While they were discussing the recent works of Christ, Jesus approaches them both and they do not recognize him. This continues for the better part of a day until they finally recognize him during the evening meal when "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (24:31). How foolish and slow of heart they were to believe all that the prophets had spoken (cf. 24:25).

Even after Jesus appears to his disciples all together, the same spiritual blurry vision appears. When Jesus stands in their midst the disciples were "startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit," evidence that doubts had arisen in their hearts" (24:37-38).

The problem for the disciples was not that they lacked sufficient evidence for the resurrection of Christ. Let us remember that even with the eyewitness evidence directly accessible to them, they were still filled with doubts. Eyewitness evidence of the resurrection is absolutely crucial for our Christian faith. But by itself, it will not make one a Christian. Many saw miracles and refused to believe.

That evidence does not stand by itself. It comes as the fulfillment of God's word. Jesus fulfilled everything written about him in all the Scriptures. Preceding the empirical evidence was the word of God. Saints who lived before Christ saw him clearly by faith and possessed his saving power. Saints who live after Christ likewise have their eyes open and embrace him through his Spirit.

That is how our eyes will be opened. By God's word and Spirit--whom he will send from on high--the eyes of the blind will be opened. The light of the resurrection will extend to the nations, even as it has touched us to this day.

Even as we trust in Christ's resurrection, we live in hope of our own. Right now, God is raising us from the dead in his work of sanctification. Our eyes are slowly being opened so that we might see Jesus's glory more clearly. Only then are we enabled to embrace the life of suffering and the cross which Christ exemplified in the previous chapter. The darkness of the world and our sin constantly seek to overwhelm us. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness will not overcome it. We walk in the light just as Christ in the light that his blood may cover us from all evil.

As we await that great day of resurrection we live as the disciples lived at the end of this Gospel. They live blessing God under the blessing of Christ, worshipping him with the joyful expectation of our final victory. For we know that the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining (1 John 2:8). The ultimate victory is assured. We will one day be in that place where the sun's light shall never fail, for the glory of God will be its light and its lamp will be the lamb.