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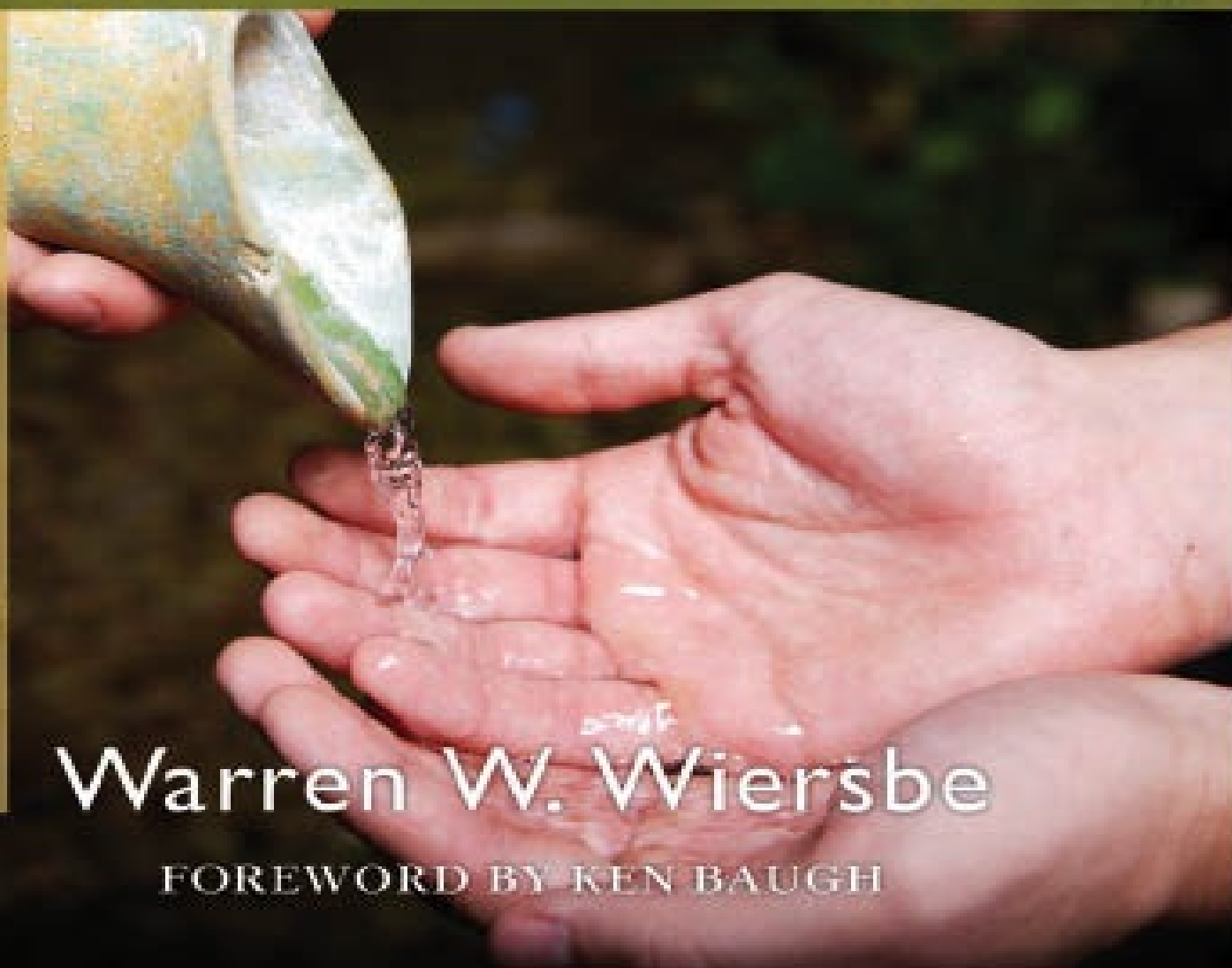
COMPASSIONATE

LET THE WORLD KNOW THAT JESUS CARES

NT

COMMENTARY

LUKE 1-13



Warren W. Wiersbe

FOREWORD BY KEN BAUGH

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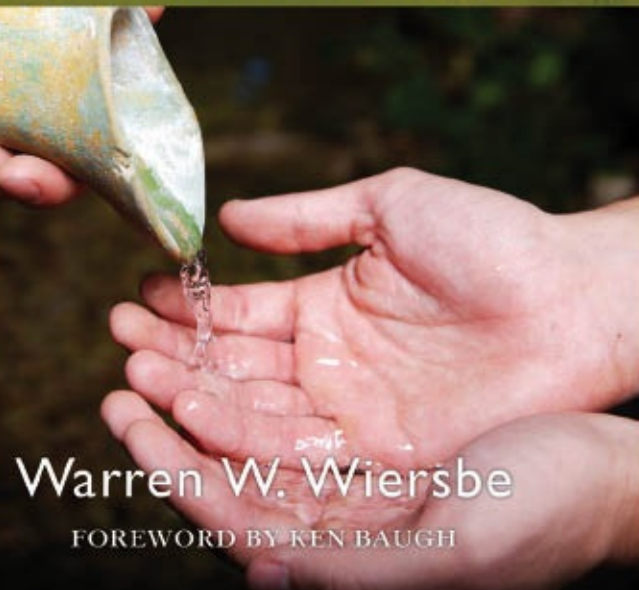
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*To my friend and physician Dr. Dale E. Michaels,
who shares with Dr. Luke a love for Jesus Christ,
a compassionate heart, and a concern to reach the world with the gospel*

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The Big Idea An Introduction to *Be Compassionate*

by Ken Baugh We don't know his name. We don't know where he was born or whether he was married or had children or not. All we know is that he was a leper who came to Jesus with a desperate request. Leprosy in Jesus' day was a slow, agonizing journey toward death. Leprosy began with a sense of tiredness and pain in the joints, and then, slowly over time, scaly white patches of dry and dying skin appeared on the person's face, hands, and arms. Then the person knew he had an incurable disease.

Eventually, these scaly white patches of skin developed into lumps on the face that rendered the person unrecognizable. These lumps burst and emitted a foul stench. As time progressed, the eyebrows fell off. The vocal cords ulcerated so that the voice became raspy and breathing was heavy and wheezy. The final

stages of the disease caused the loss of feeling in the fingers and toes, and then all mental faculties began to fail as the leper slipped into a coma and died.

But excruciating physical pain was not all the leper experienced. Leprosy in Jesus' day also carried a moral stigma, because people believed that all lepers were cursed by God. Every other disease needed to be healed, but a leper needed to be cleansed. Lepers were thought to be extreme sinners, dirty before a holy God and therefore deserving of such an extreme punishment. Additionally, lepers were also treated as social outcasts. Everywhere they went, they had to call out in a loud voice, "Unclean, unclean," so everyone could get out of their way.

It's hard to imagine what it would feel like, physically, morally, and socially, to be a leper in Jesus' day. A leper was an outcast in every way: alienated by society, family, and friends as well as by God. Yet Jesus reached out to a leper as the Lord of compassion. This compassion, I believe, is the Big Idea that runs throughout the first half of Luke. Let's pick up the story in Luke 5:12 (NIV): While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

Notice that the leper doesn't ask Jesus if He *can* heal him, but if He *will* heal him. This man believes that God had cursed him, so he falls at Jesus' feet in total humility, begging Jesus to heal him. And you can bet that the disciples are standing around looking at this pathetic sight and wondering what Jesus will do. You see, no self-respecting rabbi would give this man the time of day. He was a sinner, cursed by God and somehow deserving of his terminal disease.

Yet notice what Jesus does. There is no dramatic pause. He doesn't turn to the disciples to give them a quick object lesson. Instead, "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' And immediately the leprosy left him" (Luke 5:13 NIV). In a shocking and unprecedented move,

Jesus heals this leper by touching him! But why does Jesus touch him? He could have healed him with a word or phrase, but instead He touched him. Why? Mark's version of the story tells us why: "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man" (Mark 1:41 NIV). This man is in the final stages of leprosy; he is desperate and no doubt grotesque to look at, let alone touch, but Jesus does both. The word Luke uses for "touch" does not mean a simple tap on the shoulder; it's the Greek word that depicts "to fasten to or to lay hold of." In other words, Jesus doesn't just barely touch the man; He grabs him out of compassion.

Human touch is a life-giving force. Babies can die from lack of touch. God created us to need the warmth and connection associated with human touch. And Jesus, as the Lord of compassion, is the first person to touch this man and welcome him back into society. Jesus disregards the social and moral customs of the day and touches this man so that he will feel loved. What a powerful lesson for the disciples to learn, that people really do matter to God and as such they must matter to His disciples.

Over and over again, the Bible reveals that God is a God of compassion: "But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God" (Ps. 86:15 NIV). "The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (Ps. 145:8–9 NIV). "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (James 5:11 NIV). Our God is a God of compassion. Jesus modeled for us that He is the Lord of compassion. Therefore, as His disciples, we must be compassionate too. And so, the Bible instructs us to show compassion to others: Be kind and compassionate to one another. (Eph. 4:32 NIV) Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion. (Col. 3:12 NIV) Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8 NIV) I believe that one of the most distinguishing

characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ is compassion, to be deeply concerned about the pain and suffering of others and willing to lend a helping hand. As you read through this commentary, I encourage you to look for further evidence that Jesus is the Lord of compassion and then ask Him to help you, as His disciple, to *Be Compassionate* toward others.

Dr. Wiersbe's commentaries have been a source of guidance and strength to me over the many years that I have been a pastor. His unique style is not overly academic, but theologically sound. He explains the deep truths of Scripture in a way that everyone can understand and apply. Whether you're a Bible scholar or a brand-new believer in Christ, you will benefit, as I have, from Warren's insights. With your Bible in one hand and Dr. Wiersbe's commentary in the other, you will be able to accurately unpack the deep truths of God's Word and learn how to apply them to your life.

Drink deeply, my friend, of the truths of God's Word, for in them you will find Jesus Christ, and there is freedom, peace, assurance, and joy.

—Ken Baugh Pastor of Coast Hills Community Church Aliso Viejo, California

A Word from the Author

“Pity is a depressant,” wrote the eccentric philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. “A man loses power when he pities.”

Nietzsche went mad in the year Adolf Hitler was born, but Hitler carried on that philosophy. Hitler despised other people and stood apart from them. He especially despised the weak and the handicapped, and he developed programs for exterminating them.

Robert Payne wrote, “Even on festive occasions he remained singularly alone, the flow of emotion ceasing abruptly when it came in contact with him.... He demanded for himself an immunity from people” (*The Life and Death of Adolph Hitler*, Praeger, p. 461).

What a contrast to Jesus Christ, the compassionate Son of Man! In his gospel, Dr. Luke describes our Lord as One who mingled with people, including publicans and sinners, and who shared the burdens of the afflicted and the weak. Jesus has proved conclusively that pity is a sign of strength, not of weakness; and that God’s power flows through loving hearts.

I think it was George Bernard Shaw who said that if the other planets are inhabited, they must be using the earth as their insane asylum. Our world is filled with hurting people who need a loving touch and a word of encouragement. Jesus has put His people here to let the world know that He cares.

His command to us is, “Be compassionate!”

—Warren W. Wiersbe

A SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF LUKE

Theme: Our Lord's journeys as the Son of Man Key verse: Luke 19:10

I. Preface (Luke 1:1–4)

II. The Journey from Heaven to Earth (Luke 1:5—4:13)

A. Birth announcements (Luke 1:5–56)

B. The babies are born (Luke 1:57—2:20)

C. Jesus' childhood and youth (Luke 2:21–52)

D. Jesus' baptism and temptation (Luke 3:1—4:13)

III. The Journey Throughout Galilee (Luke 4:14—9:17)

IV. The Journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:18—19:27) V. The Ministry in Jerusalem
(Luke 19:28—24:53)

Chapter One

Hear the Good News!

[\(Luke 1\)](#)

If ever a man wrote a book filled with good news for everybody, Dr. Luke is that man. His key message is, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He presents Jesus Christ as the compassionate Son of Man, who came to live among sinners, love them, help them, and die for them.

In this gospel you meet individuals as well as crowds, women and children as well as men, poor people as well as rich people, and sinners along with saints. It’s a book with a message for *everybody*, because Luke’s emphasis is on the universality of Jesus Christ and His salvation: “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10).

Dr. Luke is named only three times in the New Testament: in Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; and Philemon 24. He wrote Acts (compare Luke 1:1–4 with Acts 1:1) and traveled with Paul (note the “we” sections in Acts 16:10–17; 20:4–15; 21:1–18, and 27:1—28:16). He was probably a Gentile (compare Colossians 4:11 and 14) and was trained as a physician. No wonder he began his book with detailed accounts of the births of two important babies! No wonder he emphasized Christ’s sympathy for hurting people! He wrote with the mind of a careful historian and with the heart of a loving physician.

The gospel of Luke was written for Theophilus (“lover of God”), probably a Roman official who had trusted Christ and now needed to be established in the faith. It’s also possible that Theophilus was a seeker after truth who was being taught the Christian message, because the word translated *instructed* in Luke 1:4 gives us our English word *catechumen*, “someone who is being taught the basics of Christianity.”

The life and message of Christ were so important that many books had already been written about Him, but not everything in them could be trusted. Luke wrote his gospel so that his readers might have an accurate and orderly narrative of the life, ministry, and message of Jesus Christ. Luke had carefully researched his material, interviewed eyewitnesses, and listened to those who had ministered the Word. Most important, he had the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The phrase *from the very first* (Gk. *anōthen*) can be translated “from above,” as it is in John 3:31 and 19:11. It speaks of the inspiration of the Spirit of God on the message that Luke wrote.

In this first chapter, Luke tells us how God’s wonderful news came to different people and how they responded to it. You will discover four different responses.

1. UNBELIEF (1:5–25)

It was indeed a dark day for the nation of Israel. The people had heard no prophetic word from God for four hundred years, not since Malachi had promised the coming of Elijah (Mal. 4:5–6). The spiritual leaders were shackled by tradition and, in some instances, corruption; and their king, Herod the Great, was a tyrant. He had nine (some say ten) wives, one of whom he had executed for no apparent reason. But no matter how dark the day, God always has His devoted and obedient people.

A faithful priest (vv. 5–7). Zacharias (“Jehovah has remembered”;

Zechariah in NIV) and Elizabeth (“God is my oath”) were a godly couple who both belonged to the priestly line. The priests were divided into twenty-four courses (1 Chron. 24), and each priest served in the temple two weeks out of the year. In spite of the godlessness around them, Zacharias and Elizabeth were faithful to obey the Word of God and live blamelessly.

Their only sorrow was that they had no family, and they made this a matter of constant prayer. Little did they know that God would answer their prayers and give them, not a priest, but a prophet! And no ordinary prophet, for their son would be the herald of the coming King!

A fearful priest (vv. 8–17). The priests on duty drew lots to see which ministries they would perform, and Zacharias was chosen to offer incense in the Holy Place. This was a high honor that was permitted to a priest but once in a lifetime. The incense was offered daily before the morning sacrifice and after the evening sacrifice, about three o’clock in the afternoon. It was probably the evening offering that was assigned to Zacharias.

You have probably noticed that God often speaks to His people and calls them while they are busy doing their daily tasks. Both Moses and David were caring for sheep, and Gideon was threshing wheat. Peter and his partners were mending nets when Jesus called them. It is difficult to steer a car when the engine is not running. When we get busy, God starts to direct us.

Luke mentions angels twenty-three times in his gospel. There are innumerable angels (Rev. 5:11), only two of which are actually named in Scripture: Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) and Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). When Gabriel appeared by the altar, Zacharias was frightened, for the angel’s appearance could have meant divine judgment.

“Fear not” is a repeated statement in the gospel of Luke (1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32). Imagine how excited Zacharias must have been when he heard that he and Elizabeth were to have a son! “Rejoicing” is another key theme

in Luke, mentioned at least nineteen times. Good news brings joy!

Gabriel instructed him to name his son John (“Jehovah is gracious”) and to dedicate the boy to God to be a Nazarite all of his life (Num. 6:1–21). He would be filled with the Spirit before birth (Luke 1:41) and would be God’s prophet to present His Son to the people of Israel (see John 1:15–34). God would use John’s ministry to turn many people back to the Lord, just as Isaiah had promised (Isa. 40:1–5).

A faithless priest (vv. 18–22). You would think that the presence of an angel and the announcement of God’s Word would encourage Zacharias’s faith, but they did not. Instead of looking to God by faith, the priest looked at himself and his wife and decided that the birth of a son was impossible. He wanted some assurance beyond the plain word of Gabriel, God’s messenger, perhaps a sign from God.

This, of course, was unbelief, and unbelief is something God does not accept. Zacharias was really questioning God’s ability to fulfill His own Word! Had he forgotten what God did for Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:9–15; Rom. 4:18–25)? Did he think that his physical limitations would hinder Almighty God? But before we criticize Zacharias too much, we should examine ourselves and see how strong our own faith is.

Faith is blessed, but unbelief is judged, and Zacharias was struck dumb (and possibly deaf, Luke 1:62) until the Word was fulfilled. “I believed, and therefore have I spoken” (2 Cor. 4:13). Zacharias did not believe; therefore he could not speak. When he left the holy place, he was unable to give the priestly benediction to the people (Num. 6:22–27) or even tell them what he had seen. Indeed, God had given him a very personal “sign” that he would have to live with for the next nine months.

A favored priest (vv. 23–25). Zacharias must have had a difficult time completing his week of ministry, not only because of his handicap, but also because of his excitement. He could hardly wait to return “unto the hill country”

(Luke 1:39) where he lived, to tell his wife the good news.

God kept His promise and Elizabeth conceived a son in her old age. There is nothing too hard for the Lord (Jer. 32:17). Apparently, the amazement and curiosity of the people forced her to hide herself even as she praised the Lord for His mercy. Not only was she to have a son, but the birth of her son was also evidence that *the Messiah was coming!* These were exciting days indeed!

2. FAITH (1:26–38)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Gabriel brought a second birth announcement, this time to a young virgin in Nazareth named Mary. At least there was variety in his assignments: an old man, a young woman; a priest, a descendent of David the king; the temple, a common home; Jerusalem, Nazareth; unbelief, faith.

The people in Judah disdained the Jews in Galilee and claimed they were not “kosher” because of their contacts with the Gentiles there (Matt. 4:15). They especially despised the people from Nazareth (John 1:45–46). But God in His grace chose a girl from Nazareth in Galilee to be the mother of the promised Messiah!

When it comes to Mary, people tend to go to one of two extremes. They either magnify her so much that Jesus takes second place (Luke 1:32), or they ignore her and fail to give her the esteem she deserves (Luke 1:48). Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, called her “the mother of my Lord” (Luke 1:43), and that is reason enough to honor her.

What do we know about Mary? She was a Jewess of the tribe of Judah, a descendant of David, and a virgin (Isa. 7:14). She was engaged to a carpenter in Nazareth named Joseph (Matt. 13:55), and apparently both of them were poor (Lev. 12:8; Luke 2:24). Among the Jews at that time, engagement was almost as binding as marriage and could be broken only by divorce. In fact, the man and

the woman were called “husband” and “wife” even before the marriage took place (compare Matt. 1:19 and Luke 2:5). Since Jewish girls married young, it is likely that Mary was a teenager when the angel appeared to her.

Mary’s surprise (vv. 26–33). When you consider Gabriel’s greeting, you can well understand why Mary was perplexed and afraid: “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!” (NIV) (The phrase *Blessed art thou among women* is not found here in many Greek manuscripts. You find it in Luke 1:42.) Why would an angel come to greet *her*? In what way was she “highly favored” (“greatly graced”) by God? How was God with her?

Mary’s response reveals her humility and honesty before God. She certainly never expected to see an angel and receive special favors from heaven. There was nothing unique about her that such things should happen. If she had been different from other Jewish girls, as some theologians claim she was, then she might have said, “Well, it’s about time! I’ve been expecting you!” No, all of this was a surprise to her.

Gabriel then gave her the good news: She would become the mother of the promised Messiah whom she would name *Jesus* (“Jehovah is salvation”; see Matt. 1:21). Note that Gabriel affirmed both the deity and the humanity of Jesus. As Mary’s son, He would be human; as Son of the Highest (Luke 1:32), He would be the Son of God (Luke 1:35). “For unto us a child is born [His humanity], unto us a son is given [His deity]” (Isa. 9:6). The emphasis is on the greatness of the Son (cf. Luke 1:15), not the greatness of the mother.

But He would also be a king, inherit David’s throne, and reign over Israel forever! If we interpret literally what Gabriel said in Luke 1:30–31, then we should also interpret literally what he said in Luke 1:32–33. He was referring to God’s covenant with David (2 Sam. 7) and His kingdom promises to the people of Israel (Isa. 9:1–7; 11—12; 61; 66; Jer. 33).

Jesus came to earth to be the Savior of the world, but He also came to fulfill

the promises God made to the Jewish fathers. Today, Jesus is enthroned in heaven (Acts 2:29–36), but it is not on *David's* throne. One day Jesus will return and establish His righteous kingdom on earth, and then these promises will be fulfilled.

Mary's surrender (vv. 34–48). Mary knew *what* would happen, but she did not know *how* it would happen. Her question in Luke 1:34 was not an evidence of unbelief (cf. Luke 1:18); rather, it was an expression of faith. She believed the promise, but she did not understand the performance. How could a virgin give birth to a child?

First, Gabriel explained that this would be a miracle, the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Joseph, her betrothed, would not be the father of the child (Matt. 1:18–25), even though Jesus would be legally identified as the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23; 4:22; John 1:45; 6:42). It's possible that some people thought Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph and that Jesus was “born of fornication” (John 8:41). This was a part of the pain that Mary had to bear all her life (Luke 2:35).

Gabriel was careful to point out that the Baby would be a “holy thing” and would not share the sinful human nature of man. Jesus knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22), and He had no sin (1 John 3:5). His body was prepared for Him by the Spirit of God (Heb. 10:5) who “overshadowed” Mary. That word is applied to the presence of God in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish tabernacle and temple (Ex. 40:35). Mary's womb became a Holy of Holies for the Son of God!

The angel ended his message by giving Mary a word of encouragement: Her aged relative Elizabeth was with child, proving that “with God nothing shall be impossible.” God gave a similar word to Abraham when He announced the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). That our God can do anything is the witness of many, including Job (Job 42:2), Jeremiah (Jer. 32:17), and even our Lord Jesus (Matt. 19:26). I personally like the translation of this verse found in the 1901 American Standard Version: “For no word of God shall be void of power.” God

accomplishes His purposes through the power of His Word (Ps. 33:9).

Mary's believing response was to surrender herself to God as His willing servant. She experienced the grace of God (Luke 1:30) and believed the Word of God, and therefore she could be used by the Spirit to accomplish the will of God. A "handmaid" was the lowest kind of female servant, which shows how much Mary trusted God. She belonged totally to the Lord, body (Luke 1:38), soul (Luke 1:46), and spirit (Luke 1:47). What an example for us to follow (Rom. 12:1–2)!

3. Joy (1:39–56)

Now that Mary knew she was to become a mother, and that her kinswoman Elizabeth would give birth in three months, she wanted to see Elizabeth so they could rejoice together. "Joy" is the major theme of this section as you see three persons rejoicing in the Lord.

(1) The joy of Elizabeth (vv. 39–45). As Mary entered the house, Elizabeth heard her greeting, was filled with the Spirit, and was told by the Lord why Mary was there. The one word that filled her lips was "blessed." Note that she did not say that Mary was blessed *above* women but *among* women, and certainly this is true. While we don't want to ascribe to Mary that which only belongs to God, neither do we want to minimize her place in the plan of God.

The thing that Elizabeth emphasized was Mary's *faith*: "Blessed is she that believed" (Luke 1:45). We are saved "by grace ... through faith" (Eph. 2:8–9). Because Mary believed the Word of God, she experienced the power of God.

(2) The joy of the unborn son, John (vv. 41, 44). This was probably the time when he was filled with the Spirit as the angel had promised (Luke 1:15). Even before his birth, John rejoiced in Jesus Christ, just as he did during his earthly ministry (John 3:29–30). As John the Baptist, he would have the great privilege of introducing the Messiah to the Jewish nation.

(3) The joy of Mary (vv. 46–56). Hers was a joy that compelled her to lift her voice in a hymn of praise. The fullness of the Spirit should lead to joyful praise in our lives (Eph. 5:18–20), and so should the fullness of the Word (Col. 3:16–17). Mary’s song contains quotations from and references to the Old Testament Scriptures, especially the Psalms and the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1–10. Mary hid God’s Word in her heart and turned it into a song.

This song is called “The Magnificat” because the Latin version of Luke 1:46 is *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*. Her great desire was to magnify the Lord, not herself. She used the phrase “He hath” eight times as she recounted what God had done for three recipients of His blessing.

What God did for Mary (vv. 46–49). To begin with, God had saved her (Luke 1:47), which indicates that Mary was a sinner like all of us and needed to trust the Lord for her eternal salvation. Not only had He saved her, but He had also chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:48). He had “regarded” her, which means He was mindful of her and looked with favor on her. No doubt there were others who could have been chosen, but God chose her! The Lord had indeed showered His grace on her (see 1 Cor. 1:26–28).

Not only was God mindful of her, but He was also mighty for her, working on her behalf (Luke 1:49). Mary would have no problem singing “great things he hath done” (see Luke 8:39; 1 Sam. 12:24; 2 Sam. 7:21–23; and Ps. 126:2–3). Because she believed God and yielded to His will, He performed a miracle in her life and used her to bring the Savior into the world.

What God did for us (vv. 50–53). In the second stanza of her song, Mary included *all* of God’s people who fear Him from generation to generation. We have all received His mercy and experienced His help. Mary named three specific groups to whom God had been merciful: the helpless (Luke 1:51), the humble (Luke 1:52), and the hungry (Luke 1:53).

The common people of that day were almost helpless when it came to justice and civil rights. They were often hungry, downtrodden, and discouraged (Luke

4:16–19), and there was no way for them to “fight the system.” A secret society of patriotic Jewish extremists called “the Zealots” used violent means to oppose Rome, but their activities only made matters worse.

Mary saw the Lord turning everything upside down: the weak dethrone the mighty, the humble scatter the proud, the nobodies are exalted, the hungry are filled, and the rich end up poor! The grace of God works contrary to the thoughts and ways of this world system (1 Cor. 1:26–28). The church is something like that band of men that gathered around David (1 Sam. 22:2).

What God did for Israel (vv. 54–55). “He shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). In spite of Israel’s destitute condition, the nation was still God’s servant, and He would help the people fulfill His purposes. God was on Israel’s side! He would remember His mercy and keep His promises (Ps. 98:1–3; see also Gen. 12:1–3; 17:19; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Were it not for Israel, Jesus Christ could not have been born into the world.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth until John was born, and then she returned to Nazareth. By then, it was clear that she was pregnant, and no doubt the tongues began to wag. After all, she had been away from home for three months, and why, people were likely asking, had she left in such a hurry? It was then that God gave the good news to Joseph and instructed him what to do (Matt. 1:18–25).

4. PRAISE (1:57–80)

God’s blessing was resting abundantly on Zacharias and Elizabeth. He sent them a baby boy, just as He promised, and they named him “John” just as God had instructed. The Jews looked on children as a gift from God and a “heritage from the Lord” (Ps. 127:3–5; 128:1–3), and rightly so, for they are. Israel would not follow the practices of their pagan neighbors by aborting or abandoning their children. When you consider that 1.5 million babies are aborted each year in the

United States alone, you can see how far we have drifted from the laws of God.

“The greatest forces in the world are not the earthquakes and the thunderbolts,” said Dr. E. T. Sullivan. “The greatest forces in the world are babies.”

Traditionally, a baby boy would be named after his father or someone else in the family, so the relatives and neighbors were shocked when Elizabeth insisted on the name *John*. Zacharias wrote “His name is John” on a tablet, and that settled it! Immediately God opened the old priest’s mouth, and he sang a hymn that gives us four beautiful pictures of what the coming of Jesus Christ to earth really means.

The opening of a prison door (v. 68). The word *redeem* means “to set free by paying a price.” It can refer to the releasing of a prisoner or the liberating of a slave. Jesus Christ came to earth to bring “deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:18), salvation to people in bondage to sin and death. Certainly we are unable to set ourselves free; only Christ could pay the price necessary for our redemption (Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–21).

The winning of a battle (vv. 69–75). In Scripture, a horn symbolizes power and victory (1 Kings 22:11; Ps. 89:17, 24). The picture here is that of an army about to be taken captive, but then help arrives and the enemy is defeated. In the previous picture, the captives were set free, but in this picture, the enemy is defeated so *that he cannot capture more prisoners*. It means total victory for the people of God.

The word *salvation* (Luke 1:69, 71) carries the meaning of “health and soundness.” No matter what the condition of the captives, their Redeemer brings spiritual soundness. When you trust Jesus Christ as Savior, you are delivered from Satan’s power, moved into God’s kingdom, redeemed, and forgiven (Col. 1:12–14).

Where did the Redeemer come from? He came from the house of David (Luke 1:69), who himself was a great conqueror. God had promised that the

Savior would be a Jew (Gen. 12:1–3), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), from the family of David (2 Sam. 7:12–16), born in David’s city, Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Both Mary (Luke 1:27) and Joseph (Matt. 1:20) belonged to David’s line. The coming of the Redeemer was inherent in the covenants God made with His people (Luke 1:72), and it was promised by the prophets (Luke 1:70).

Note that the results of this victory are sanctity and service (Luke 1:74–75). He sets us free, not to do our own will, because that would be bondage, but to do His will and enjoy His freedom.

The canceling of a debt (vv. 76–77). *Remission* means “to send away, to dismiss, as a debt.” All of us are in debt to God because we have broken His law and failed to live up to His standards (Luke 7:40–50). Furthermore, all of us are spiritually bankrupt, unable to pay our debt. But Jesus came and paid the debt for us (Ps. 103:12; John 1:29).

The dawning of a new day (vv. 78–79). *Dayspring* means “sunrise.” The people were sitting in darkness and death, and distress gripped them when Jesus came; but He brought light, life, and peace. It was the dawn of a new day because of the tender mercies of God (see Matt. 4:16).

The old priest had not said anything for nine months, but he certainly compensated for his silence when he sang this song of praise to God! And how joyful he was that his son was chosen by God to prepare the way for the Messiah (Isa. 40:1–3; Mal. 3:1). John was “prophet of the Highest” (Luke 1:76), introducing to Israel “the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32) who was conceived in Mary’s womb by “the power of the Highest” (Luke 1:35).

Instead of enjoying a comfortable life as a priest, John lived in the wilderness, disciplining himself physically and spiritually, waiting for the day when God would send him out to prepare Israel for the arrival of the Messiah. People like Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25–38) had been waiting for this day for many years, and soon it would come.

God calls us today to believe His good news. Those who believe it

experience His joy and want to express their praise to Him. It is not enough for us to say that Jesus is *a* Savior, or even *the* Savior. With Mary, we must say, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God *my* Savior” (Luke 1:47).

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Luke emphasizes Christ’s concern for hurting people. Who are some hurting people in your world?

2. Wiersbe highlights four ways people responded to the good news in Luke 1—unbelief, faith, joy, and praise. Where do you see one or more of these responses in your own life currently?

3. Why do you think God often speaks to His people when they are active, as He did to Zacharias (Zechariah)?

4. After the angel announced the joyous news that Zacharias and Elizabeth would have a son, what big mistake did Zacharias make? Why do you suppose he did this?

5. What character traits can be seen in Mary's response to the angel's surprising visit?
6. How was Zacharias's question "How can I be sure of this?" different from Mary's "How will this be?"
7. What expressions of joy do you read about as Mary visited Elizabeth?
8. According to Mary's words in 1:46–55, what did God do for Mary? What did God do for others?
9. What four pictures of the incarnation do we see in Zacharias's hymn (1:68–79)? What do they mean?
10. The results of the victory of salvation are sanctity and service (1:74–75). Explain what you think these are meant to look like in your life.

Chapter Two

The Lord Is Come!

(Luke 2)

Luke 2 may well be the most familiar and beloved portion in Luke's gospel. My wife and I still read the first twenty verses together each Christmas Eve, just as we did when our children were growing up. The story is old, but it is ever new, and God's people never tire of it.

Dr. Luke gives us three glimpses into the early years of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. THE NEWBORN BABY (2:1–20)

“As weak as a baby!” is a common expression that could not be applied to the Baby Jesus in the manger. While He was as weak as any other baby humanly speaking, He was also the center of power as far as heaven was concerned.

His birth drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem (vv. 1–7). Augustus Caesar was ruling, but God was in charge, for He used Caesar's edict to move Mary and Joseph eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill His Word. Rome took a census every fourteen years for both military and tax purposes, and each Jewish male had to return to the city of his father's to record his name, occupation, property, and family.

When Mary said “Be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38), it

meant that from then on, her life would be a part of the fulfillment of divine prophecy. God had promised that the Savior would be a human, not an angel (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:16), and a Jew, not a Gentile (Gen. 12:1–3; Num. 24:17). He would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and the family of David (2 Sam. 7:1–17), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in Bethlehem, the city of David (Mic. 5:2).

All of this occurred just as the Scriptures said, and Caesar unknowingly played an important part. A. T. Pierson used to say, “History is His story,” and President James A. Garfield called history “the unrolled scroll of prophecy.” If God’s Word controls our lives, then the events of history only help us fulfill the will of God. “I am watching over My word to perform it,” promises the Lord (Jer. 1:12 NASB).

Mary and Joseph were already husband and wife, but since they did not consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born, she is called his “espoused wife” (Matt. 1:18–25). The journey must have been very trying for her, but she rejoiced in doing the will of God, and she was no doubt glad to get away from the wagging tongues in Nazareth.

Mothers in that day wrapped their infants in long bands of cloth to give the limbs strength and protection. The word translated “manger” (Luke 2:7, 12, 16) is translated “stall” in Luke 13:15, and can mean either a feeding trough or an enclosure for animals. You see ancient stone troughs even today as you travel in the Holy Land, and it is probable that such a trough cradled the infant Jesus. Many scholars believe that our Lord was born in a cave where animals were sheltered and not in a wooden shed such as you see in modern manger scenes.

Bethlehem means “house of bread,” the ideal birthplace for the Bread of Life (John 6:35). Its rich historic heritage included the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin (Gen. 35:16–20; see also Matt. 2:16–18), the marriage of Ruth, and the exploits of David. It is worth noting that the name *Benjamin* means “son of my right hand,” and the name *David* means “beloved.” Both of these names

apply to our Lord, for He is the Beloved Son (Luke 3:22) at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1).

His birth drew the angels from heaven (vv. 8–14). How amazed the angels must have been when they saw the Creator born as a creature, the Word coming as a speechless baby. The best commentary on this is 2 Corinthians 8:9, and the best response from our hearts is wonder and worship. “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).

The first announcement of the Messiah's birth was given by an angel to some anonymous shepherds. Why shepherds? Why not to priests or scribes? By visiting the shepherds, the angel revealed the grace of God toward mankind. Shepherds were really outcasts in Israel. Their work not only made them ceremonially unclean, but it also kept them away from the temple for weeks at a time so that they could not be made clean. God does not call the rich and mighty; He calls the poor and the lowly (Luke 1:51–53; 1 Cor. 1:26–29).

The Messiah came to be both the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world (John 1:29). Perhaps these shepherds were caring for the flocks that would provide sacrifices for the temple services. It was fitting that the good news about God's Shepherd and Lamb be given first to humble shepherds.

Shepherds are not easily fooled. They are practical men of the world who have little to do with fantasy. If they said that they saw angels and went and found the Messiah, then you could believe them. God selected hard-working men to be the first witnesses that His Son had come into the world.

First, one angel appeared (Gabriel?) and gave the glad announcement, and then a chorus of angels joined him and gave an anthem of praise. For the first time in centuries, the glory of God returned to earth. If brave shepherds were afraid at what they saw and heard, then you can be sure it was real!

“Fear not!” is one of the key themes of the Christmas story (Luke 1:13, 30, 74; and see Matt. 1:20). Literally the angel said, “I announce to you good news,

a great joy which shall be to all the people.” He used the word that means “to preach the good news,” a word Luke uses often in both his gospel and in the book of Acts. We see here Luke’s emphasis on a worldwide gospel: The good news is for everybody, not just for the Jews.

What was the good news? Not that God had sent a soldier or a judge or a reformer, but that He had sent a Savior to meet man’s greatest need. It was a message of peace to a world that had known much war. The famous “Pax Romana” (Roman Peace) had been in effect since 27 BC, but the absence of war doesn’t guarantee the presence of peace.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, “While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns more than even for outward peace.”

The Jewish word *shalom* (peace) means much more than a truce in the battles of life. It means well-being, health, prosperity, security, soundness, and completeness. It has to do more with character than circumstances. Life was difficult at that time just as it is today. Taxes were high, unemployment was high, morals were slipping lower, and the military state was in control. Roman law, Greek philosophy, and even Jewish religion could not meet the needs of men’s hearts. Then, God sent His Son!

The angels praised God at creation (Job 38:7), and now they praised Him at the beginning of the new creation. The whole purpose of the plan of salvation is “glory to God” (see Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). God’s glory had dwelt in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34) and in the temple (2 Chron. 7:1–3), but had departed because of the nation’s sin (1 Sam. 4:21; Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22–23). Now God’s glory was returning to earth in the person of His Son (John 1:14). That lowly manger was a Holy of Holies because Jesus was there!

His birth drew the shepherds from the fields (vv. 15–20). The phrase “even unto Bethlehem” suggests that these men were located some distance

away, but they were willing to make the trip in order to see the newborn Messiah. Certainly they arranged for others to care for their flocks while they hastened to Bethlehem. Halford Luccock called this “the first Christmas rush,” but it was certainly different from the Christmas rushes we see today!

The verb *found* in Luke 2:16 means “found after a search.” The shepherds knew what to look for: a newborn Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And they found Him! They worshipped Him and marveled at God’s grace and goodness and the miracle He had wrought for them.

These shepherds are good examples for us to imitate today. They received by faith the message God sent them and then responded with immediate obedience. After finding the Baby, they reported the good news to others, “glorifying and praising God.” *They took the place of the angels* (Luke 2:13–14)! Then they humbly returned to their duties, new men going back to the same old job.

For some reason, shepherds were not permitted to testify in court, but God used some humble shepherds to be the first human witnesses that prophecy had been fulfilled and the Messiah had been born. The angels have never experienced the grace of God, so they can’t bear witness as we can. Telling others about the Savior is a solemn obligation as well as a great privilege, and we who are believers must be faithful.

[2. THE CHILD \(2:21–38\)](#)

Dr. Luke now tells us about three important meetings in the temple in Jerusalem: the child Jesus met Moses (Luke 2:20–24), Simeon (Luke 2:25–35), and Anna (Luke 2:36–38).

Moses (vv. 21–24). Note that the word *law* is used five times in Luke 2:21–40. Though He came to deliver His people from the bondage of the law, Jesus was “made under the law” and obeyed its commands (Gal. 4:1–7). He did not

come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17–18).

Jesus' parents obeyed the law first by having the child circumcised when He was eight days old. This was the sign and seal of the covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen. 17), and it was required of every Jewish male who wanted to practice the faith. The Jews were proud to be God's covenant people, and they scornfully called the Gentiles "the uncircumcision" (Eph. 2:11–12). It is unfortunate that circumcision became an empty ritual for many Jews, because it proclaimed an important spiritual truth (Deut. 10:15–20; Rom. 2:28–29).

"His circumcision was His first suffering for us," said the late Donald Grey Barnhouse, a Philadelphia minister and author. It symbolized the work the Savior did on the cross in dealing with our sin nature (Gal. 6:15; Phil. 3:1–3; Col. 2:10–11). In obedience to the Lord, Mary and Joseph gave Him the name *Jesus*, which means "Jehovah is salvation" (Matt. 1:21).

But circumcision was only the beginning. When the child was forty days old, Mary and Joseph had to come to the temple for the purification rites described in Leviticus 12. They also had to "redeem" the boy since He was Mary's firstborn (Ex. 13:1–12). They had to pay five shekels to redeem the Redeemer who would one day redeem us with His precious blood (1 Peter 1:18–19). Their humble sacrifice would suggest that they were too poor to bring a lamb (2 Cor. 8:9). But He was the Lamb!

Our Lord's relationship to the law is an important part of His saving ministry. He was made under the law (Gal. 4:4); and though He rejected man's religious traditions, He obeyed God's law perfectly (John 8:46). He bore the curse of the law for us (Gal. 3:13) and set us free from bondage (Gal. 5:1).

Simeon (vv. 25–35). Simeon and Anna, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, were a part of the faithful Jewish remnant that eagerly looked for their Messiah (Mal. 3:16). Because of his readiness and eagerness to die (Luke 2:29), Simeon is usually pictured as a very old man, but nothing in Scripture supports this. Tradition says he was 113 years old, but it is only tradition.

“The consolation of Israel” means the messianic hope. One of the traditional Jewish prayers is, “May I see the consolation of Israel!” That prayer was answered for Simeon when he saw Jesus Christ in the temple. He was a man who was led by the Spirit of God, taught by the Word of God, and obedient to the will of God, and therefore he was privileged to see the salvation of God. How important it is for people to see God’s salvation, Jesus Christ, before they see death.

In Luke 2:29–32, we find Simeon’s response to seeing Jesus. This is the fifth and last of the “Christmas songs” in Luke. (Elizabeth, 1:42–45; Mary, 1:46–55; Zacharias, 1:68–79; the angels, 2:13–14). It is first of all a *worship* hymn as he blesses God for keeping His promise and sending the Messiah. He joyfully praises God that he has been privileged to see the Lord’s Christ.

But his song is also a *salvation* hymn: “For mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Luke 2:30). Now he is ready to die! The word *depart* in the Greek has several meanings, and each of them tells us something about the death of a Christian. It means to release a prisoner, to untie a ship and set sail, to take down a tent (see 2 Cor. 5:1–8), and to unyoke a beast of burden (see Matt. 11:28–30). God’s people are not afraid of death because it only frees us from the burdens of this life and leads into the blessings of the next life.

Simeon’s song is a *missionary* hymn, which is something unusual for a devout Jew standing in the temple. He sees this great salvation going out to the Gentiles! Jesus has restored the glory to Israel and brought the light to the Gentiles so that all people can be saved (see Luke 2:10). Remember that the compassion of Christ for the whole world is one of Luke’s major themes.

Then Simeon stopped praising and started prophesying (Luke 2:34–35), and in his message used three important images: the stone, the sign, and the sword.

The stone is an important Old Testament image of God (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 18:2; 71:3; Deut. 32:31). Messiah would be a “rejected cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22; Luke 20:17–18; Acts 4:11), and the nation of Israel would stumble over Him

(Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:32). Because of Jesus Christ, many in Israel would fall in conviction and then rise in salvation. (Simeon seems to be speaking about one group, not two.) Even today, God's people Israel stumble over the cross (1 Cor. 1:23) and do not understand that Jesus is their Rock (1 Peter 2:1–6).

The word *sign* means “a miracle,” not so much as a demonstration of power but as a revelation of divine truth. Our Lord's miracles in John's gospel are called “signs” because they reveal special truths about Him (John 20:30–31). Jesus Christ is God's miracle, and yet, instead of admiring Him, the people attacked Him and spoke against Him. His birth was a miracle, yet they slandered it (John 8:41). They said His miracles were done in the power of Satan (Matt. 12:22–24) and that His character was questionable (John 8:48, 52; 9:16, 24). They slandered His death (Ps. 22:6–8; Matt. 27:39–44) and lied about His resurrection (Matt. 27:62–66). Today, people are even speaking against His coming again (2 Peter 3).

But the way people speak about Jesus Christ is evidence of what is in their hearts. He is not only the “salvation stone” and the “judgment stone” (Dan. 2:34, 45), but He is also the “touchstone” that exposes what people are really like. “What think ye of Christ?” (Matt. 22:42) is still the most important question for anybody to answer (1 John 4:1–3).

The image of the sword was for Mary alone, and it spoke of the suffering and sorrow she would bear as the mother of the Messiah. (This suggests that Joseph was dead when Jesus began His ministry thirty years later, or Joseph would have been included.) The Greek word means a large sword such as Goliath used (1 Sam. 17:51), and the verb means “constantly keep on piercing.”

During our Lord's life and ministry, Mary did experience more and more sorrow until one day she stood by His cross and saw Him suffer and die (John 19:25–27). However, without minimizing her devotion, Mary's personal pain must not in any way be made a part of Christ's redemptive work. Only He could die for the sins of the world (1 Tim. 2:5–6).

How much did Mary and Joseph understand of God's great plan for this miracle Child? We don't know, but we do know that Mary stored up all these things and pondered them (Luke 2:19, 51). The word means "to put things together"; Mary sought for some pattern that would help her understand God's will. There were times when Mary misunderstood Him (Mark 3:31–35), and this would add to her suffering. The last time you find Mary named in Scripture, she is in the upper room, praying with the other believers (Acts 1:14).

Anna (vv. 36–38). Her name means "grace," and she was a godly widow of great age. There are forty-three references to women in Luke's gospel, and of the twelve widows mentioned in the Bible, Luke has three (Luke 2:36–40; 7:11–15; 21:1–4; and note 18:1–8). It isn't difficult to see the heart of a physician in Luke's presentation.

Widows didn't have an easy time in that day; often they were neglected and exploited in spite of the commandment of the law (Ex. 22:21–22; Deut. 10:17–18; 14:29; Isa. 1:17; see also 1 Tim. 5:3–16). Anna devoted herself to "serving God by worship" through fastings and prayers. She moved from the tribe of Asher and remained in the temple, waiting for the appearing of God's promised Messiah.

God's timing is always perfect. Anna came up just as Simeon was praising the Lord for the Child Jesus, so she joined in the song! I would like to have heard these elderly people singing in the temple! Their praise was inspired by the Spirit of God, and God accepted it. But Anna did much more than sing; she also spread the good news among the other faithful members of "the remnant" who were waiting for the redemption of Israel. The excitement began to spread as more and more people heard the good news.

Anna was a prophetess, which meant she had a special gift of declaring and interpreting God's message. Other prophetesses in Scripture are Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Hulduh (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and the wife of Isaiah (Isa. 8:3). The evangelist Philip had four daughters who were

prophetesses (Acts 21:8–9).

3. THE YOUTH (2:39–52)

Having obeyed the law in everything, Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth, which would be our Lord's home until He started His official ministry. There were many Jewish men with the name *Jesus* (Joshua), so He would be known as "Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 2:22), and His followers would be called "Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5; see Matt. 2:23). His enemies used the name scornfully and Pilate even hung it on the cross (Matt. 27:31), but Jesus was not ashamed to use it when He spoke from heaven (Acts 22:8). That which men scorned (John 1:46), Jesus Christ took to heaven and made glorious!

What did Jesus do during the "hidden years" at Nazareth? Dr. Luke reports that the lad developed physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually (Luke 2:40, 52). In His incarnation, the Son of God set aside the independent use of His own divine attributes and submitted Himself wholly to the Father (Phil. 2:1–11). There are deep mysteries here that no one can fully understand or explain, but we have no problem accepting them by faith.

Jesus did not perform any miracles as a boy, traditions notwithstanding, because the turning of water into wine was the beginning of His miracles (John 2:1–11). He worked with Joseph in the carpenter shop (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) and apparently ran the business after Joseph died. Joseph and Mary had other children during those years (Matt. 13:55–56; John 7:1–10), for the "until" of Matthew 1:25 indicates that the couple eventually had normal marital relations.

Luke gives us only one story from our Lord's youthful years. Joseph and Mary were devout Jews who observed Passover in Jerusalem every year. Three times a year the Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem to worship (Deut. 16:16), but not all of them could afford to do so. If they chose one feast, it was usually the Passover, and they tried to take their family with them, for it was the

most important feast on the Jewish calendar.

People traveled to the feasts in caravans, the women and children leading the way and setting the pace, and the men and young men following behind. Relatives and whole villages often traveled together and kept an eye on each other's children. At the age of twelve, Jesus could easily have gone from one group to another and not been missed. Joseph would think Jesus was with Mary and the other children, while Mary would suppose He was with Joseph and the men, or perhaps with one of their relatives.

They had gone a day's journey from Jerusalem when they discovered that Jesus was missing. It took a day to return to the city and another day for them to find Him. During those three days, Joseph and Mary had been "greatly distressed" (Luke 2:48, "sorrowing"). This word is used to describe Paul's concern for lost Israel (Rom. 9:2) as well as the pain of lost souls in hades (Luke 16:24–25).

It is worth noting that Luke's phrase "Joseph and his mother" (Luke 2:43) suggests the virgin birth, while the phrase "thy father and I" (Luke 2:48) indicates that Joseph was accepted as the legal father of Jesus (see Luke 3:23). To use Luke 2:48 to disprove the virgin birth is stretching a point.

Whether Jesus had spent the entire time in the temple, we don't know. It certainly would have been safe there, and the heavenly Father was watching over Him. We do know that when Joseph and Mary found Him, He was in the midst of the teachers, asking them questions and listening to their answers, and the teachers were amazed at both His questions and His answers.

Mary's loving rebuke brought a respectful but astonished reply from Jesus: "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" (Luke 2:49 NASB). It can also be translated "in the things of My Father" (NASB margin), but the idea is the same. Jesus was affirming His divine sonship and His mission to do the will of the Father.

The word *must* was often on our Lord's lips: "I must preach" (Luke 4:43); "The Son of man must suffer" (Luke 9:22); "The Son of Man must be lifted up" (John 3:14 NIV). Even at the age of twelve, Jesus was moved by a divine compulsion to do the Father's will.

Since Jesus "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:52), we wonder how much He understood God's divine plan at that time. We must not assume that at the age of twelve He was omniscient. Certainly He grew in His comprehension of those mysteries as He communed with His Father and was taught by the Spirit.

One thing is sure: Joseph and Mary didn't understand! This was a part of the pain from "the sword" that Simeon had promised her (Luke 2:35), and no doubt it happened again and again as the boy matured. Years later, during His ministry, our Lord's family didn't understand Him (Luke 8:19–21; John 7:1–5).

Jesus is a wonderful example for all young people to follow. He grew in a balanced way (Luke 2:52) without neglecting any part of life, and His priority was to do the will of His Father (see Matt. 6:33). He knew how to listen (Luke 2:46) and how to ask the right questions. He learned how to work, and He was obedient to His parents.

The Boy Jesus grew up in a large family, in a despised city, nurtured by parents who were probably poor. The Jewish religion was at an all-time low, the Roman government was in control, and society was in a state of fear and change. Yet when Jesus emerged from Nazareth, eighteen years later, the Father was able to say of Him, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

May the Father be able to say that about us!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. The angel announced “peace” (2:14) to people on earth because of the newly born Savior. What did he mean by “peace”?
2. How did God work His sovereign plan through Caesar Augustus (2:1–5)? Why is this helpful for us to know?
3. Why were Joseph and Mary careful to obey the law of the Lord and of the civil authorities (2:1–5, 21–24)? What makes their obedience different from the kind of law-keeping that Jesus later criticized?
4. Read Matthew 5:17–18 and Galatians 4:4. Why did God choose to send the Savior to us under the law, not above it?
5. Why do you think Wiersbe calls the newborn Jesus “the center of power as far as heaven was concerned”?
6. Why was the first announcement of the Messiah’s birth given to lowly shepherds? In what way are the shepherds good examples for us today?
7. Why is “fear not” one of the key themes of the Christmas story?

8. What was the “consolation of Israel” that Simeon and Anna were waiting for?

9. Who in this part of the story would you most want to be like, and how?

Chapter Three

This Is the Son of God!

[\(Luke 3—4\)](#)

If Socrates would enter the room, we should rise and do him honor,” said Napoléon Bonaparte. “But if Jesus Christ came into the room, we should fall down on our knees and worship Him.”

Dr. Luke would have agreed with the famous French general, for in these two chapters, he makes it clear that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God. Notice the witnesses that he presents, all of whom declare that Jesus is God’s Son.

JOHN THE BAPTIST (3:1–20)

When he came (vv. 1–2). When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, no prophetic voice had been heard in Israel for four hundred years. His coming was a part of God’s perfect timing, for everything that relates to God’s Son is always on schedule (Gal. 4:4; John 2:4; 13:1). The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar was AD 28–29.

Luke named seven different men in Luke 3:1–2, including a Roman emperor, a governor, three tetrarchs (rulers over a fourth part of an area), and two Jewish high priests. But God’s Word was not sent to any of them! Instead, the message of God came to John the Baptist, a humble Jewish prophet.

How he came (v. 3). Resembling the prophet Elijah in manner and dress (Luke 1:17; Matt. 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8), John came to the area near the Jordan River, preaching and baptizing. He announced the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 3:3) and urged the people to repent. Centuries before, Israel had crossed the Jordan (a national baptism) to claim their Promised Land. Now God summoned them to turn from sin and enter His spiritual kingdom.

Keep in mind that John did much more than preach against sin; he also proclaimed the gospel. The word *preached* in Luke 3:18 gives us the English word *evangelize* (“to preach the good news”). John introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and told people to trust in Him. John was only the best man at the wedding: Jesus was the Bridegroom (John 3:25–30). John rejoiced at the opportunity of introducing people to the Savior, and then getting out of the way.

A unique feature about John’s ministry was baptism (Luke 20:1–8; John 1:25–28). Baptism was nothing new to the people, for the Jews baptized Gentile proselytes. But John baptized *Jews*, and this was unusual. Acts 19:1–5 explains that John’s baptism *looked forward* to the coming of the Messiah, while Christian baptism *looks back* to the finished work of Christ.

But there was something even beyond John’s baptism, and that was the baptism that the Messiah would administer (Luke 3:16). He would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit, and this began at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1ff.). Today, the moment a sinner trusts Christ, he or she is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

What is the “baptism of fire”? It does not refer to the “tongues of fire” at Pentecost, for tongues over a person’s head could hardly be called a “baptism.” John’s use of the symbol of “fire” in Luke 3:9 and 17 indicates that he is talking about *judgment* and not blessing. In AD 70 the nation experienced a baptism of fire when Titus and the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the people. All unbelievers will experience a baptism of judgment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15).

Why he came (vv. 4–20). The illustrations used in the chapter help us understand the ministry God gave to John.

To begin with, John the Baptist was *a voice* “crying in the wilderness” (Luke 3:4; see also Isa. 40:1–5, John 1:23). He was like the herald who went before the royal procession to make sure the roads were ready for the king. Spiritually speaking, the nation of Israel was living in a “wilderness” of unbelief, and the roads to spiritual reality were twisted and in disrepair. The corruption of the priesthood (instead of one, there were *two* high priests!) and the legalistic hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees had weakened the nation spiritually. The people desperately needed to hear a voice from God, and John was that faithful voice.

It was John’s task to prepare the nation for the Messiah and then present the Messiah to them (Luke 1:16–17, 76–77; John 1:6–8, 15–34). He rebuked their sins and announced God’s salvation, for without conviction there can be no conversion.

John is also compared to *a farmer* who chops down useless trees (Luke 3:9) and who winnows the grain to separate the wheat from the chaff (Luke 3:17). Like some “religious sinners” today, many of the Jews thought they were destined for heaven simply because they were descendants of Abraham (see John 8:31–34; Rom. 4:12–17; Gal. 3:26–29). John reminded them that God gets to the *root* of things and is not impressed with religious profession that does not produce fruit. In the last judgment, the true believers (wheat) will be gathered by God, while the lost sinners (chaff) will be burned in the fire.

In Luke 3:7, John pictured the self-righteous sinners as snakes that slithered out of the grass because a fire was coming! Jesus compared the Pharisees to vipers (Matt. 23:33) because their self-righteousness and unbelief made them the children of the Devil (John 8:44–45; Rev. 20:2). How tragic that the religious leaders refused to obey John’s message and submit to his baptism (Luke 20:1–8). They not only failed to enter the kingdom themselves, but their bad example

and false teaching also kept other people from entering.

John the Baptist was also *a teacher* (Luke 3:12). He not only preached publicly, but he also had a personal ministry to the people, telling them how to practice their new faith (Luke 3:10–14). He told them not to be selfish but to share their blessings with others (see Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37).

Even the tax collectors came to John for counsel. These men were despised by their fellow Jews because they worked for the Romans and usually extorted money from the people. Luke emphasized the fact that Jesus was the friend of tax collectors (Luke 5:27ff.; 15:1–2; 19:1–10). John did not tell them to quit their jobs but to do their work honestly.

Likewise, the soldiers were not condemned for their vocation. Rather, John told them to refrain from using their authority to get personal gain. These were probably Jewish soldiers attached to the temple or to the court of one of the Jewish rulers. It was not likely that Roman soldiers would ask a Jewish prophet for counsel.

John was faithful in his ministry to prepare the hearts of the people and then to present their Messiah to them. He clearly stated that Jesus was “the Lord” (Luke 3:4) and the Son of God (John 1:34). Because John rebuked Herod Antipas for his adulterous marriage to Herodias, he was imprisoned by the king and finally beheaded. However, he had faithfully finished his God-given assignment and prepared the people to meet the Messiah, the Son of God.

THE FATHER AND THE SPIRIT (3:21–38)

One day, after all the others had been baptized, Jesus presented Himself for baptism at the Jordan, and John at first refused to comply (Matt. 3:13–15). He knew that Jesus of Nazareth was the perfect Son of God who had no need to repent of sin. Why then was the sinless Son of God baptized?

To begin with, in His baptism He identified with the sinners that He came to

save. Also, His baptism was the official start of His ministry (Acts 1:21–22; 10:37–38). He was “about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23), and the Jewish Levites began their work at age thirty (see Num. 4:3, 35). But our Lord’s words tell us the main reason for His baptism: “for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15 NASB). In what way? In the way pictured by His baptism in the Jordan. Many Bible scholars agree that New Testament baptism was by immersion, which is a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. *Our Lord’s baptism in water was a picture of His work of redemption* (Matt. 20:22; Luke 12:50). It was through His baptism of suffering on the cross that God “fulfilled all righteousness.” (The “us” in Matthew 3:15 does not mean John and Jesus. It means the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.)

When our Lord came up from the water, the Father spoke from heaven and identified Him as the beloved Son of God, and the Spirit visibly came upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22). Those who deny the Trinity have a difficult time explaining this event.

This is the first of three recorded occasions when the Father spoke from heaven. The second was when Jesus was transfigured (Luke 9:28–36), and the third was during His last week before the cross (John 12:28).

Only Luke mentions that Jesus was praying, and this was only one of many occasions (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1; 23:34, 46). As the perfect Son of Man, Jesus depended on His Father to meet His needs, and that was why He prayed.

Luke interrupted his narrative at this point to give us a genealogy of Jesus. Matthew’s genealogy (Matt. 1:1–17) begins with Abraham and moves forward to Jesus, while Luke’s begins with Jesus and moves backward to Adam. Matthew gives us the genealogy of Joseph, the legal foster-father of Jesus, while Luke gives us the genealogy of His mother, Mary. Luke 3:23 can be translated: “When He began His ministry, Jesus was about thirty years old (being

supposedly the son of Joseph), the son of Heli [an ancestor of Mary].” Mary herself would not be mentioned because it was unusual for women to be named in the official genealogies, though Matthew names four of them (Matt. 1:3, 5, 16).

By putting the genealogy here, Luke reminded his readers that the Son of God was also the Son of Man, born into this world, identified with the needs and problems of mankind. And, since Joseph and Mary were both in David’s line, these genealogies prove that Jesus of Nazareth has the legal right to David’s throne (Luke 1:32–33).

SATAN (4:1–13)

Even the enemy must admit that Jesus is the Son of God. “If thou be the Son of God” (Luke 4:3, 9) is not a supposition but an affirmation. It means “in view of the fact that You are the Son of God” (WUEST). Indeed, the fact of His deity was the basis for the first of the three temptations. “Since you are the Son of God,” Satan argued, “why be hungry? You can change stones into bread!” Satan wanted Jesus to disobey the Father’s will by using His divine power for His own purposes.

Why was Jesus tempted? For one thing, it was proof that the Father’s approval was deserved (Luke 4:22). Jesus is indeed the “beloved Son” who always does whatever pleases His Father (John 8:29). Also, in His temptation, Jesus exposed the tactics of the enemy and revealed to us how we can overcome when we are tempted. This experience helped prepare our Lord for His present ministry as our sympathetic High Priest, and we may come to Him for the help we need to overcome the tempter (Heb. 2:16–18; 4:14–16). The first Adam was tempted in a beautiful garden and failed. The Last Adam was tempted in a dangerous wilderness (Mark 1:13) and succeeded.

We have at our disposal the same spiritual resources that Jesus used when

He faced and defeated Satan: prayer (Luke 3:21–22), the Father’s love (Luke 3:22), the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:1), and the Word of God (“It is written”). Plus, we have in heaven the interceding Savior who has defeated the enemy completely. Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God can use these difficult experiences to put the best into us. Temptation is Satan’s weapon to defeat us, but it can become God’s tool to build us (see James 1:1–8, 13–17).

In the first temptation, Satan suggested that there must be something wrong with the Father’s love since His “beloved Son” was hungry. In years past Israel hungered in the wilderness, and God sent them bread from heaven, so surely Jesus could use His divine power to feed Himself and save His life. Satan subtly used this same approach on Eve: “God is holding out on you! Why can’t you eat of *every* tree in the garden? If He really loved you, He would share everything with you!”

But the test was even more subtle than that, for Satan was asking Jesus to *separate the physical from the spiritual*. In the Christian life, eating is a spiritual activity, and we can use even our daily food to glorify God (Rom. 14:20–21; 1 Cor. 10:31). Whenever we label different spheres of our lives “physical,” “material,” “financial,” or “spiritual,” we are bound to leave God out of areas where He rightfully belongs. Christ must be first in *everything*, or He is first in nothing (Matt. 6:33). It is better to be hungry in the will of God than satisfied out of the will of God.

When our Lord quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, He put the emphasis on the word *man*. As the eternal Son of God, He had *power* to do anything, but as the humble Son of Man, He had *authority* to do only that which the Father willed. (Note carefully John 5:17, 30; 8:28; 10:17–18; 15:10, 15.) As the Servant, Jesus did not use His divine attributes for selfish purposes (Phil. 2:5–8). Because He was man, He hungered, but He trusted the Father to meet His needs in His own time and His own way.

You and I need bread for the body (Matt. 6:11), but we must not live by

physical bread alone. We also need food for the inner person to satisfy our spiritual needs. This food is the Word of God (Ps. 119:103; Jer. 15:16; 1 Peter 2:2). What digestion is to the body, meditation is to the soul. As we read the Word and meditate on it, we receive spiritual health and strength for the inner person, and this enables us to obey the will of God.

We do not know why Luke reversed the second and third temptations, but since he did not claim to record the events in order, he is not contradicting Matthew 4:1–11. The word *then* in Matthew 4:5 indicates that Matthew's order is the correct one. We do seem to have in Luke's order a parallel to 1 John 2:16: the lust of the flesh (stones into bread), the lust of the eyes (the world's kingdoms and glory), and the pride of life (jump from the pinnacle of the temple), but it's doubtful that Luke had this in mind.

The Father had already promised to give the Son all the kingdoms of the world (Ps. 2:7–8), but first the Son had to suffer and die (John 12:23–33; Rev. 5:8–10). The suffering must come first, then the glory (Luke 24:25–27). The adversary offered Jesus these same kingdoms if He would *once* worship him, and this would eliminate the necessity of His going to the cross (note Matt. 16:21–23). Satan has always wanted to take God's place and receive worship (Isa. 14:13–14).

As the prince of this world, Satan has a certain amount of delegated authority from God (John 12:31; 14:30). One day he will share this authority with the Antichrist, the man of sin, who will rule the world for a brief time (Rev. 13). Satan's offer to Christ was valid, but his terms were unacceptable, and the Savior refused.

Again, Jesus quoted God's Word, this time Deuteronomy 6:13. Satan had said nothing about *service*, but Jesus knew that whatever we worship, we will serve. Service to the Lord is true freedom, but service to Satan is terrible bondage. God's pattern is to start with suffering and end with glory (1 Peter 5:10), while Satan's pattern is to start with glory and end with suffering. Satan

wants us to sacrifice the eternal for the temporary and take the “easy way.”

There are no “shortcuts” in the Christian life, and there is no easy way to spiritual victory and maturity. If the perfect Son of God had to hang on a tree before He could sit on the throne, then His disciples should not expect an easier way of life (see Luke 9:22–26; Acts 24:22).

Satan questioned the Father’s love when he tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. He questioned His hope when he offered Jesus the world’s kingdoms this side of the cross (see Heb. 12:1–3). Satan questioned the Father’s faithfulness when he asked Jesus to jump from the temple and prove that the Father would keep His promise (Ps. 91:11–12). Thus, the enemy attacked the three basic virtues of the Christian life—faith, hope, and love.

The pinnacle was probably a high point at the southeast corner of the temple, far above the Kidron Valley. Satan can tempt us even in the Holy City at the highest part of the holy temple! Following the example of Jesus, Satan decided to quote Scripture, and he selected Psalm 91:11–12. Of course, he misquoted the promise, and besides, he omitted “in all thy ways.”

When a child of God is in the will of God, he can claim the Father’s protection and care. But if he willfully gets into trouble and expects God to rescue him, then he is tempting God. (For an example of this, see Ex. 17:1–7.) We tempt God when we “force” Him (or dare Him) to act contrary to His Word. It is a dangerous thing to try God’s patience, even though He is indeed long-suffering and gracious.

Our Lord’s reply was, “on the other hand, it is written” (Matt. 4:7 NASB), and He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16. *Jesus balanced Scripture with Scripture to get the total expression of God’s will.* If you isolate verses from their contexts, or passages from the total revelation of Scripture, you can prove almost anything from the Bible. Almost every false cult claims to be based on the teachings of the Bible. When we get our orders from God by picking out verses from here

and there in the Bible, we are not living by faith. We are living by chance and tempting the Lord. “For whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23), and “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17 NKJV).

Jesus came out of the wilderness a victor, but Satan did not give up. He watched for other opportunities to tempt the Savior away from the Father’s will. “Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle,” said Andrew Bonar, and he was right.

THE SCRIPTURES (4:14–30)

The events recorded in John 1:19—4:45 took place at this time, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke did not record them. They moved right into the Lord’s ministry in Galilee, and Luke alone reports His visit to His hometown of Nazareth. By now, the news had spread widely about the miracle worker from Nazareth, so His family, friends, and neighbors were anxious to see and hear Him.

It was our Lord’s custom to attend public worship, a custom His followers should imitate today (Heb. 10:24–25). He might have argued that the “religious system” was corrupt, or that He didn’t need the instruction, but instead, He made His way on the Sabbath to the place of prayer.

A typical synagogue service opened with an invocation for God’s blessing and then the recitation of the traditional Hebrew confession of faith (Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21). This was followed by prayer and the prescribed readings from the law and from the prophets, with the reader paraphrasing the Hebrew Scriptures in Aramaic.

This was followed by a brief sermon given by one of the men of the congregation or perhaps by a visiting rabbi (see Acts 13:14–16). If a priest was present, the service closed with a benediction. Otherwise, one of the laymen prayed and the meeting was dismissed.

Jesus was asked to read the Scripture text and to give the sermon. The

passage He read included Isaiah 61:1–2, and He selected it for His “text.” The Jewish rabbis interpreted this passage to refer to the Messiah, and the people in the synagogue knew it. You can imagine how shocked they were when Jesus boldly said that it was written about Him and that He had come to usher in the “acceptable year of the Lord.”

The reference here is the “Year of Jubilee” described in Leviticus 25. Every seventh year was a “sabbatical year” for the nation, when the land was allowed to rest, and every fiftieth year (after seven sabbaticals) was set apart as the “Year of Jubilee.” The main purpose of this special year was the balancing of the economic system: Slaves were set free and returned to their families, property that was sold reverted to the original owners, and all debts were canceled. The land lay fallow as man and beast rested and rejoiced in the Lord.

Jesus applied all of this to His own ministry, not in a political or economic sense, but in a physical and spiritual sense. He had certainly brought good news of salvation to bankrupt sinners and healing to brokenhearted and rejected people. He had delivered many from blindness and from bondage to demons and disease. Indeed, it was a spiritual “Year of Jubilee” for the nation of Israel!

The problem was that His listeners would not believe in Him. They saw Him only as the son of Mary and Joseph, the Boy they had watched grow up in their own city. Furthermore, they wanted Him to perform in Nazareth the same miracles He had done in Capernaum, but He refused. That’s the meaning of the phrase, “Physician, heal thyself.” Do a miracle!

At first, they admired the way He taught, but it didn’t take long for their admiration to turn into antagonism. Why? *Because Jesus began to remind them of God’s goodness to the Gentiles!* The prophet Elijah bypassed all the Jewish widows and helped a Gentile widow in Sidon (1 Kings 17:8–16), and his successor Elisha healed a Gentile leper from Syria (2 Kings 5:1–15). Our Lord’s message of grace was a blow to the proud Jewish exclusivism of the congregation, and they would not repent. Imagine this hometown Boy saying

that Jews had to be saved by grace just like the pagan Gentiles!

The congregation was so angry, they took action to kill Jesus! St. Augustine said, “They love truth when it enlightens them, but hate truth when it accuses them.” That applies well to many congregations today, people who want “gracious words” (Luke 4:22) but who don’t want to face the truth (see John 1:17).

In spite of the unbelief of the people in Nazareth, the Scriptures declared that Jesus of Nazareth is God’s Son, the Messiah sent to fulfill His promises. The people who do not want Him and who reject “the acceptable year of the Lord” will one day face “the day of vengeance of our God” (Isa. 61:2). How significant that Jesus stopped reading at that very place!

THE DEMONS (4:31–44)

Jesus left Nazareth and set up His headquarters in Capernaum (Matt. 4:13–16), the home of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. He taught regularly in the synagogue and astonished the people by the authority of His message (see Matt. 7:28–29). He further astonished them by His authority over the demons.

Why would a demonized man attend the synagogue? Did he know Jesus would be there? Our Lord did not want the demons to bear witness to Him, so He told them to be still and He cast them out. Of course, the demons know that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 4:34, 41), and knowing this, they tremble (James 2:19).

After the service, Jesus went to Peter’s house, and there He healed Peter’s mother-in-law. (Dr. Luke noted that she had a “great fever.”) At sundown, when the Sabbath had ended and healing was permissible, a host of people brought their sick and afflicted to Peter’s house and asked Jesus to help them. Again, He silenced the demons who confessed Him to be the Son of God.

The Lord must have been weary after such a demanding day, and yet He was

up early the next morning to pray (Mark 1:35). It was in prayer that He found His strength and power for service, and so must we.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In Luke 3—4, how does each of these witness that Jesus is the Son of God: John the Baptist, the Father, the Spirit, Satan, the Scriptures?
2. How does each of these witnesses affect your faith?
3. In what way was John's baptism unusual? What was his purpose and message?
4. How is the Holy Trinity shown at Jesus' baptism?
5. Why does Luke include a genealogy of Jesus?
6. Why was Jesus tempted by Satan?

7. In what ways is Jesus' response to temptation a model for us?
8. What does it mean to tempt God?
9. Why did the Jews in the synagogue become antagonistic toward Jesus after His sermon on Isaiah 61:1–2?
10. In what way was Jesus proclaiming the Year of Jubilee? In what ways have you been freed or healed?

Chapter Five

So What's New? Everything!

(Luke 6)

For over a year, Jesus ministered as a popular itinerant Teacher and Healer, and multitudes followed Him. But now the time had come for Him to “organize” His followers and declare just what His kingdom was all about.

In this chapter, we see the Lord Jesus establishing three new spiritual entities to replace that which was now “worn out” in the Jewish religion: a new Sabbath, a new nation, and a new blessing in the new spiritual kingdom.

1. A NEW SABBATH (6:1–11) The sanctity of the seventh day was a distinctive part of the Jewish faith. God gave Israel the Sabbath law at Sinai (Neh. 9:13–14) and made it a sign between Him and the nation (Ex. 20:8–11; 31:12–17). The word *Sabbath* means “rest” and is linked with God’s cessation of work after the six days of creation (Gen. 2:2–3). Some of the rabbis taught that Messiah could not come until Israel had perfectly kept the Sabbath, so obeying this law was very important both personally and nationally.

To call Sunday “the Sabbath” is to confuse the first day and the seventh day and what each signifies. The Sabbath is a reminder of the completion of “the old

creation,” while the Lord’s Day is a reminder of our Lord’s finished work in “the new creation” (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:10; 4:24). The Sabbath speaks of rest *after* work and relates to the law, while the Lord’s Day speaks of rest *before* work and relates to grace. The Lord’s Day commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit and the “birthday” of the church (Acts 2).

The early church met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1–2). However, some Jewish believers kept the Sabbath, and this sometimes led to division. Paul addressed this problem in Romans 14:1—15:13 where he gave principles to promote both liberty and unity in the church. But Paul always made it clear that *observing special days had nothing to do with salvation* (Gal. 4:1–11; Col. 2:8–17). We are not saved from sin by faith in Christ *plus* keeping the Sabbath. We are saved by faith in Christ alone.

By their strict and oppressive rules, the Pharisees and scribes had turned the Sabbath day into a burden instead of the blessing God meant it to be, and Jesus challenged both their doctrine and their authority. He had announced a new “Year of Jubilee” (Luke 4:19), and now He would declare a new Sabbath. He had already healed a lame man on the Sabbath, and the religious leaders had determined to kill Him (John 5:18; also note John 5:16). Now He was to violate their Sabbath laws on two more occasions.

(1) In the field (vv. 1–5). It was lawful for a Jew to eat from a neighbor’s vineyard, orchard, or field, provided he did not fill a container or use a harvesting implement (Deut. 23:24–25). The disciples were hungry, so they picked the heads of wheat, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But in so doing, according to the rabbis, they broke the Sabbath law, because they were harvesting, winnowing, and preparing food!

Always alert for something to criticize, some of the Pharisees asked Jesus why He permitted His disciples to violate the Sabbath laws. This was His second offense, and they were sure they had a case against Him. How tragic that their

slavish devotion to religious rules blinded them to the true ministry of the law as well as the very presence of the Lord who gave them the law.

Jesus did not argue with them; instead, He took them right to the Word of God (1 Sam. 21:1–6). The “showbread” was comprised of twelve loaves, one for each tribe in Israel, and it stood on the table in the Holy Place in the tabernacle and then in the temple (Ex. 25:23–30; Lev. 24:5–9). Fresh bread was put on the table each Sabbath, and only the priests were allowed to eat the loaves.

But David and his men ate the loaves, and what Jew would condemn Israel’s great king? “He was God’s anointed!” they might argue, *but that was exactly what Jesus claimed for Himself* (Luke 4:18). Not only was He God’s Anointed, but He was also the Lord of the Sabbath! When Jesus made that statement, He was claiming to be Jehovah God, because it was the Lord who established the Sabbath. If Jesus Christ is indeed Lord of the Sabbath, then He is free to do *on* it and *with* it whatever He pleases. The Pharisees did not miss His meaning, you can be sure.

God is more concerned about meeting human needs than He is about protecting religious rules. Better that David and his men receive strength to serve God than that they perish only for the sake of a temporary law. God desires compassion, not sacrifice (Matt. 12:7, quoting Hos. 6:6). The Pharisees, of course, had a different view of the law (Matt. 23:23).

(2) In the synagogue (vv. 6–11). The Pharisees knew that it was our Lord’s practice to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath, so they were there to watch Him and to gather more evidence against Him. Did they know that the handicapped man would also be there? Did they “plant” him there? We do not know, and Jesus probably did not care. His compassionate heart responded to the man’s need, and He healed him. Jesus could have waited a few hours until the Sabbath was over, or He could have healed the man in private, but He did it openly and immediately. It was a deliberate violation of the Sabbath traditions.

Our Lord’s defense in the field was based on the Old Testament Scriptures,

but His defense in the synagogue was based on *the nature of God's Sabbath law*. God gave that law to help people, not to hurt them. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Every man in the synagogue would rescue a sheep on the Sabbath, so why not rescue a man made in the image of God (Matt. 12:11–12)? The scribes and Pharisees had turned God's gift into a heavy yoke that nobody could bear (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1).

This miracle illustrates the power of faith in God's Word. Jesus commanded the man to do the very thing he could not do, and yet *he did it!* "For no word from God shall be void of power" (Luke 1:37 ASV). God's commandments are always God's enablements.

The scribes and Pharisees were filled with fury. It certainly did not do them any good to worship God in the synagogue that morning. So angry were they that they even joined forces with the Herodians (the Jews who supported Herod) in a plot to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6). Jesus knew their thoughts (Matt. 12:15; Luke 6:8), so He merely withdrew to the Sea of Galilee, ministered to the multitudes, and then went up to a mountain alone to pray.

Jesus gives a spiritual "sabbath rest" that is in the heart all the time (Matt. 11:28–30). Unlike the galling yoke of the law, the yoke that Jesus gives is "well-fitting," and His "burden is light." When the sinner trusts the Savior, he has peace with God because his sins are forgiven, and he is reconciled to God (Rom. 5:1–11). As the believer yields to Christ in daily experience, he enjoys "the peace of God" in his heart and mind (Phil. 4:6–7).

2. A NEW NATION (6:12–19) Jesus spent the whole night in prayer, for He was about to call His twelve apostles from among the many disciples who were following Him. A *disciple* is a learner, an apprentice; while an *apostle* is a chosen messenger sent with a special commission. Jesus had many disciples (see Luke 10:1) but

only twelve handpicked apostles.

Why did He pray all night? For one thing, He knew that opposition against Him was growing and would finally result in His crucifixion, so He prayed for strength as He faced the path ahead. Also, He wanted the Father's guidance as He selected His twelve apostles, for the future of the church rested with them. Keep in mind that one of the Twelve would betray Him, *and Jesus knew who he was from the beginning* (John 6:64). Our Lord had real human emotions (Luke 22:41–44; Heb. 5:7–8), and it was through prayer that He made this difficult choice.

The names of the apostles are also given in Matthew 10:1–4; Mark 3:16–19; and Acts 1:13 (minus Judas). In all the lists, Peter is named first and, except in Acts 1:13, Judas is named last. The Judas in Acts 1:13 is Judas the brother (more likely “the son”) of James, who is also called Thaddeus in Mark 3:18. It was not unusual for one man to have two or more names.

Simon received the name *Peter* (stone) when Andrew brought him to Jesus (John 1:40–42). Bartholomew is the same as Nathanael (John 1:45–49). The other Simon in the group was nicknamed “Zelotes,” which can mean one of two things. It may mean that he belonged to a group of fanatical Jewish patriots known as “the Zealots,” whose purpose was to deliver Israel from the tyranny of Rome. They used every means at hand, including terror and assassination, to accomplish their purposes. Or, perhaps the word *Zelotes* translates from the Hebrew word *qanna*, which means “Jealous for God, zealous for God's honor.” (It is transliterated in Matt. 10:4 as “Simon the Canaanite” [*qanna*].) Whether Simon was known for his zeal to honor God, or his membership in a subversive organization, we cannot be sure—possibly both.

Nor are we sure of the origin of the word *Ischariot*. It probably means “man [*ish* in Hebrew] of Kerioth,” a town in southern Judah (Josh. 15:25). Some connect it with the Aramaic word *seqar*, which means “falsehood.” Thus, “Judas the false one.” The geographical explanation is probably right.

What an interesting group of men! They illustrate what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29, and they are an encouragement to us today. After all, if God could use them, can He not use us? Perhaps seven of them were fishermen (see John 21:1–3), one was a tax collector, and the other four are anonymous as far as their vocations are concerned. They were ordinary men; their personalities were different, yet Jesus called them to be with Him, to learn from Him, and to go out to represent Him (Mark 3:14).

Why twelve apostles? Because there were twelve tribes in Israel, and Jesus was forming the nucleus for a new nation (see Matt. 21:43; 1 Peter 2:9). The first Christians were Jews because the gospel came “to the Jew first” (Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16). Later, the Gentiles were added to the church through the witness of the scattered Jewish believers (Acts 11:19ff.) and the ministry of Paul, apostle to the Gentiles. In the church, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile; we are “all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

It is significant that after Jesus called His twelve apostles, and before He preached this great sermon, He took time to heal many needy people. This was a demonstration of both His power and His compassion. It was also a reminder to His newly appointed assistants that their job was to share His love and power with a needy world. It is estimated that there were three hundred million people in the world in Jesus’ day, while there are over five billion today, four-fifths of them in the less-developed nations. What a challenge to the church!

3. A NEW BLESSING (6:20–49) This sermon is probably a shorter version of what we call “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5—7), though some fine evangelical scholars believe these were two different events. If they are the same event, the fact that Matthew locates it on a mountain (Matt. 5:1), while Luke puts it “in the plain” (Luke 6:17), creates no problem. Dr. D. A. Carson points

out that the Greek word translated “plain” can mean “a plateau in a mountainous region” (*Exegetical Fallacies*, Baker, 43).

Jesus went “into the hill country” with His disciples. After a night of prayer, He came down to a level place, ordained the Twelve, ministered to the sick, and then preached this sermon. It was His description of what it means to have a life of “blessing.”

To most Jewish people, the word *blessing* evoked images of a long life; wealth; a large, healthy family; a full barn; and defeated enemies. God’s covenant with Israel did include such material and physical blessings (Deut. 28; Job 1:1–12; Prov. 3:1–10), for this was how God taught and disciplined them. After all, they were “little children” in the faith, and we teach children by means of rewards and punishments. With the coming of Jesus, Israel’s childhood period ended, and the people had to mature in their understanding of God’s ways (Gal. 4:1–6).

Jesus was preaching to His disciples as well as to the multitudes (Luke 6:27, 47), for even the Twelve had to unlearn many things before they could effectively serve Him. Furthermore, they had left everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11, 28), and no doubt were asking themselves, “What is in store for us?” (See Matt. 19:27.) The Lord explained in this sermon that the truly blessed life comes not from *getting*, or from *doing*, but from *being*. The emphasis is on Godlike character.

This sermon is not “the gospel,” and nobody goes to heaven by “following the Sermon on the Mount.” Dead sinners cannot obey the living God; they must first be born again and receive God’s life (John 3:1–7, 36).

Nor is this sermon a “constitution” for the kingdom that God will one day establish on earth (Matt. 20:21; Luke 22:30). The Sermon on the Mount applies to life today and describes the kind of godly character we should have as believers in this world. Certainly our Lord describes a life situation quite unlike that of the glorious kingdom, including hunger, tears, persecution, and false

teachers.

What Jesus did was to focus on *attitudes*: our attitude toward circumstances (Luke 6:20–26), people (Luke 6:27–38), ourselves (Luke 6:39–45), and God (Luke 6:46–49). He emphasized four essentials for true happiness: faith in God, love toward others, honesty with ourselves, and obedience toward God.

(1) Circumstances (vv. 20–26). Life was difficult for the people of that day, and there was not much hope their circumstances would be improved. Like people today, many of them thought that happiness came from having great possessions, or holding an exalted position, or enjoying the pleasures and popularity that money can buy. Imagine how surprised they were when they heard Jesus describe happiness in terms *just the opposite of what they expected!* They discovered that what they needed most was not a change in circumstances but a change in their relationship to God and in their outlook on life.

Jesus was not teaching that poverty, hunger, persecution, and tears were blessings *in themselves*. If that were true, He would never have done all He did to alleviate the sufferings of others. Rather, Jesus was describing the *inner attitudes* we must have if we are to experience the blessedness of the Christian life. We should certainly do what we can to help others in a material way (James 2:15–17; 1 John 3:16–18), but we must remember that no amount of “things” can substitute for a personal relationship with God.

Matthew’s account makes this clear: “Blessed are the poor *in spirit* ... Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst *after righteousness*” (Matt. 5:3, 6). Jesus was not glorifying material poverty; rather, He was calling for that brokenness of heart that confesses spiritual poverty within (Luke 18:9–14; Phil. 3:4–14). The humble person is the only kind the Lord can save (Isa. 57:15; 66:2; 1 Peter 5:6). If you compare “the Beatitudes” with Isaiah 61:1–3 and Luke 4:18, you will see that our Lord’s emphasis was on the condition of the heart and not the outward circumstances. Mary expressed this same insight in her song of praise (Luke 1:46–55).

Jesus Himself would experience the persecution described in Luke 6:22, and so would His disciples. How can we rejoice when men attack us? By remembering that it is a privilege to suffer for His sake (Phil. 3:10). When they treat us the way they treated Him, it is evidence that we are starting to live as He lived, and that is a compliment. All of the saints of the ages were treated this way, so we are in good company! Furthermore, God promises a special reward for all those who are faithful to Him, so the best is yet to come!

The four “woes” all share a common truth: You take what you want from life and you pay for it. If you want immediate wealth, fullness, laughter, and popularity, you can get it, but there is a price to pay: *that is all you will get*. Jesus did not say that these things were wrong. He said that *being satisfied with them is its own judgment*.

H. H. Farmer wrote that “to Jesus the terrible thing about having wrong values in life and pursuing wrong things is not that you are doomed to bitter disappointment, but that you are *not*; not that you do not achieve what you want, but that you *do*” (*Things Not Seen*, Nishbet [London], 96). When people are satisfied with the lesser things of life, the good instead of the best, then their successes add up only as failures. These people are spiritually bankrupt and do not realize it.

Life is built on character, and character is built on decisions. But decisions are based on values, *and values must be accepted by faith*. Moses made his life-changing decisions on the basis of values that other people thought were foolish (Heb. 11:24–29), but God honored his faith. The Christian enjoys all that God gives him (1 Tim. 6:17) because he lives “with eternity’s values in view.”

(2) People (vv. 27–38). Jesus assumed that anybody who lived for eternal values would get into trouble with the world’s crowd. Christians are the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13–16), and sometimes the salt stings and the light exposes sin. Sinners show their hatred by avoiding us or rejecting us (Luke 6:22), insulting us (Luke 6:28), physically abusing us (Luke

6:29), and suing us (Luke 6:30). This is something we must expect (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12).

How should we treat our enemies? We must love them, do them good, and pray for them. Hatred only breeds more hatred, “for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:20 NIV). This cannot be done in our own strength, but it can be done through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22–23).

We must not look at these admonitions as a series of rules to be obeyed. They describe an attitude of heart that expresses itself positively when others are negative, and generously when others are selfish, all to the glory of God. It is an inner disposition, not a legal duty. We must have wisdom to know when to turn the other cheek and when to claim our rights (John 18:22–23; Acts 16:35–40). Even Christian love must exercise discernment (Phil. 1:9–11).

Two principles stand out: We must treat others as we would want to be treated (Luke 6:31), which assumes we want the very best spiritually for ourselves; and we must imitate our Father in heaven and be merciful (Luke 6:36). The important thing is not that we are vindicated before our enemies but that we become more like God in our character (Luke 6:35). This is the greatest reward anyone can receive, far greater than riches, food, laughter, or popularity (Luke 6:24–26). Those things will one day vanish, but character will last for eternity. We must believe Matthew 6:33 and practice it in the power of the Spirit.

Luke 6:37–38 reminds us that we reap what we sow and in the amount that we sow. If we judge others, we will ourselves be judged. If we forgive, we shall be forgiven, but if we condemn, we shall be condemned (see Matt. 18:21–35). He was not talking about eternal judgment but the way we are treated in this life. If we live to give, God will see to it that we receive, but if we live only to get, God will see to it that we lose. This principle applies not only to our giving of

money, but also to the giving of ourselves in ministry to others.

(3) Self (vv. 39–45). The four striking figures in this section teach us some important lessons about ministry. To begin with, as His disciples, we must be sure that we see clearly enough to guide others in their spiritual walk. While there are blind people who have a keen sense of direction, it is not likely any of them will be hired as airplane pilots or wilderness guides. Jesus was referring primarily to the Pharisees, who were leading the people astray (Matt. 15:14; 23:16). If we see ourselves as excellent guides, but do not realize our blindness, we will only lead people into the ditch (see Rom. 2:17–22).

Luke 6:40 reminds us that we cannot lead others where we have not been ourselves, nor can we be all that our Master is. In fact, the more we strive to be like Him, the more we realize how far short we fall. This is a warning against pride, for nothing blinds a person like pride.

Continuing the image of “the eye,” Jesus taught that we must be able to see clearly enough to help our brother see better. It certainly is not wrong to help a brother get a painful speck of dirt out of his eye, *provided we can see what we are doing*. The crowd must have laughed out loud when Jesus described an “eye doctor” with *a plank* in his eye, performing surgery on a patient with *a speck* in his eye!

The emphasis here is on being honest with ourselves and not becoming hypocrites. It is easy to try to help a brother with his faults *just so we can cover up our own sins!* People who are constantly criticizing others are usually guilty of something worse in their own lives.

The illustration of the tree reminds us that fruit is always true to character. An apple tree produces apples, not oranges, and a good person produces good fruit, not evil. Believers do sin, but the witness of their words and works is consistently good to the glory of God. In terms of ministry, servants of God who are faithful will reproduce themselves in people who are in turn true to the Lord (2 Tim. 2:2).

The last image, the treasury, teaches us that what comes out of the lips depends on what is inside the heart. The human heart is like a treasury, and what we speak reveals what is there. A man who apologized for swearing by saying, “It really wasn’t in me!” heard a friend say, “It had to be in you or it couldn’t have come out of you!”

We must be honest with ourselves and admit the blind spots in our lives, the obstacles that blur our vision, and the areas within that must be corrected. Then we can be used of the Lord to minister to others and not lead them astray.

(4) God (vv. 46–49). Our Lord’s emphasis here is on obedience. It is not enough merely to hear His Word and call Him “Lord.” We must also obey what He commands us to do. All of us are builders, and we must be careful to build wisely. To “build on the rock” simply means to obey what God commands in His Word. To “build on the sand” means to give Christ lip service, but not obey His will. It may look as if we are building a strong house, but if it has no foundation, it cannot last. The storm here is not the last judgment but the tests of life that come to every professing Christian. Not everybody who professes to know the Lord has had a real experience of salvation. They may have been active in church and other religious organizations, but if they are not saved by faith, they have no foundation to their lives. When difficulties come, instead of glorifying the Lord, they desert Him, and their house of testimony collapses.

Nobody can really call Jesus Christ “Lord” except by the Holy Spirit of God (Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 12:3). If Christ is in our hearts, then our mouths must confess Him to others (Rom. 10:9–10). If we are “rooted and built up in him” (Col. 2:7), then our fruits will be good and our house will withstand the storms. We may have our faults and failures, but the steady witness of our lives will point to Christ and honor Him.

This is the “new blessing” that Jesus offered His nation and that He offers us today. We can experience the “heavenly happiness” and true blessedness that only He can give. The basis for all of this is personal saving faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ, for, as Dr. H. A. Ironside once said, “We cannot live the life until first we possess it.”

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what sense did Jesus establish a new Sabbath?
2. What are some differences between the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day?
3. What was Jesus saying when He claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath?
4. Wiersbe says, “God is more concerned about meeting human needs than He is about protecting religious rules.” When have you felt a conflict between needs and rules? How did you resolve it?
5. What was the purpose of the Sabbath? How had the legalists distorted it? How did Jesus show them their error?
6. Why did Jesus choose the twelve apostles? What was their function, and how

would they fulfill it?

7. How can Jesus' choice of those apostles be an encouragement to us today?
8. What do the words blessed and blessing mean?
9. What inner attitudes must we have in order to experience the blessings of the Christian life (6:20–49)? Which of these are most challenging for you? Why?
10. What is the difference between a person who builds on sand and one who builds on rock? What does building your house on rock involve for you?

Chapter Nine

What in the World Does a Christian Do?

(Luke 10)

The three scenes in Luke 10 illustrate the threefold ministry of every Christian believer, and they answer the question, “What in the world does a Christian do?”

To begin with, we are the Lord’s *ambassadors*, sent to represent Him in this world (Luke 10:1–24). We are also *neighbors*, looking for opportunities to show mercy in the name of Christ (Luke 10:25–37). But at the heart of all our ministry is devotion to Christ, so we must be *worshippers* who take time to listen to His Word and commune with Him (Luke 10:38–42).

Whether we are in the harvest field, on the highway, or in the home, our highest privilege and our greatest joy is to do the will of God.

1. AMBASSADORS: REPRESENTING THE LORD (10:1–24) This event should not be confused with the sending out of the Twelve (Matt. 10; Luke 9:1–11). There are similarities in the charges given, but this is to be expected since both groups were sent by the same Master to do the same basic job. The twelve apostles ministered throughout Galilee, but these men were sent into Judea, and the

men in this chapter are not called apostles. They were anonymous disciples.

Why is this event recorded only by Luke, and why did Jesus select seventy men instead of some other number? (Some texts say seventy-two, and the textual evidence is about even.) Just as the Twelve were associated in number with the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel, so the Seventy may be associated with the seventy nations listed in Genesis 10. Luke's emphasis is on the universality of the gospel message, so it seems reasonable that he would be led by the Holy Spirit to include this event. It was a symbolic way of saying, "Jesus wants the message spread to all nations."

Explanation (vv. 1–11). These men were not called "apostles," but they were still "sent [*aposello*] with a commission" to represent the Lord. They were therefore truly ambassadors of the King. Not only were they sent *by* Him, but they were also sent *before* Him to prepare the way for His coming. Their calling was certainly a dignified one.

It was also a difficult calling (Luke 10:2). Harvesting is hard work, even when there are many people helping you, but these men were sent into a vast field with very few workers to help them reap a great harvest. Instead of praying for an easier job, they were to pray for more laborers to join them, and we today need to pray that same prayer. (Please note that it is *laborers*, not spectators, who pray for more laborers! Too many Christians are praying for somebody else to do a job they are unwilling to do themselves.) Their calling was a dangerous one. As they invaded enemy territory (Luke 10:17), they would be like "lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). But as long as they relied on the Lord, they would win the battle. "Any man who takes Jesus Christ seriously becomes the target of the Devil," Vance Havner often told audiences. "Most church members do not give Satan enough trouble to arouse his opposition."

It would require discipline and faith for them to do the job (Luke 10:4–8). There was an urgency about the work, and the Lord did not want them to be

overburdened with extra supplies or be delayed on the road by elaborate Eastern greetings. They had to trust God to provide homes and food for them, and they were not to be embarrassed to accept hospitality. After all, they were laboring for the Lord and bringing blessing into the home, and “the laborer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10:7; see also 1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:18).

They were ambassadors of peace, bringing healing to the sick, deliverance to the possessed, and the good news of salvation to lost sinners. Like Joshua’s army of old, they first proclaimed peace to the cities. If a city rejected the offer of peace, then it chose judgment (Deut. 20:10–18). It is a serious thing to reject the ambassadors God sends.

It is important to note that the special power that Jesus gave to His apostles (Luke 9:1) and to the Seventy is not ours to claim today. These two preaching missions were very special ministries, and God did not promise to duplicate them in our age. Our Lord’s commission to us emphasizes the proclamation of the message, not the performing of miracles (Matt. 28:19–20; Luke 24:46–49).

Denunciation (vv. 12–16). This seems like harsh language from the lips of the Son of God, but we dare not ignore it or try to explain it away. He named three ancient cities that had been judged by God—Sodom (Gen. 19), and Tyre and Sidon (Ezek. 26—28; Isa. 23)—and used them to warn three cities of His day: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. These three cities had been given more privileges than the three ancient cities, and therefore they had more responsibility. If Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon were destroyed, how could Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum escape?

To hear Christ’s ambassadors means to hear Him, and to despise His representatives means to despise Him. “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21; see also 2 Cor. 5:18–21). The way a nation treats an ambassador is the way it treats the government the ambassador represents. For an interesting illustration of this truth, read 2 Samuel 10.

Jubilation (vv. 17–24). There is a threefold joy here: the joy of service

(Luke 10:17–19), the joy of salvation (Luke 10:20), and the joy of sovereignty (Luke 10:21–24).

We can well understand the joy of the Seventy as they returned to report their victories to Jesus. He had given them power and authority to heal, to cast out demons, and to preach the Word, and they were successful! In the midst of their great joy, they were careful to give God the glory (“in thy name”).

They had seen individual victories from city to city, but Jesus saw these victories as part of a war that dethroned and defeated Satan (note Isa. 14:4–23; John 12:31–32; Rev. 12:8–9). As believers, we are weak in ourselves, but we can be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10ff.). Each victory is important to the Lord, no matter how insignificant it may seem in our eyes. Satan will not finally be judged until Jesus casts him into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10), but God’s people can today claim Christ’s Calvary victory by faith (Col. 2:15).

But the enemy will not give up! Satan would certainly attack Christ’s servants and seek to destroy them. That is why our Lord added the words of encouragement in Luke 10:19. He assured them that their authority was not gone now that the preaching mission had ended, and that they could safely tread on the “old serpent” without fear (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:9).

The Lord cautioned them not to “go on rejoicing” over their victories but to rejoice because their names had been written in heaven. (The verb means “they have been written and they stand written.” It is a statement of assurance. See Phil. 4:3; Rev. 20:12–15.) As wonderful as their miracles were, the greatest miracle of all is still the salvation of a lost soul. The Greek word translated “written” means “to inscribe formally and solemnly.” It was used for the signing of a will, a marriage document, or a peace treaty, and also for the enrolling of a citizen. The perfect tense in the Greek means “it stands written.”

But our highest joy is not found in service or even in our salvation, but in being submitted to the sovereign will of the heavenly Father, for this is the

foundation for both service and salvation. Here we see God the Son rejoicing through God the Holy Spirit because of the will of God the Father! “I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Ps. 40:8).

Jesus was not rejoicing because sinners were blind to God’s truth, for God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). He rejoiced because *the understanding of that truth* did not depend on natural abilities or education. If that were the case, most of the people in the world would be shut out of the kingdom. When the Twelve and the Seventy were preaching, they did not see the “wise and learned” humbling themselves to receive God’s truth and grace, but they saw the “common people” trusting the Word (Luke 7:29–30; 1 Cor. 1:26–29). In His sovereign will, God has ordained that sinners must humble themselves before they can be lifted up (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:6).

Christ’s ambassadors were indeed privileged people. They were able to see and hear things that the greatest saints in the Old Testament ages yearned to see and hear but could not. The Messiah was at work, and they were a part of His work!

2. NEIGHBORS: IMITATING THE LORD (10:25–37) It was expected that rabbis would discuss theological matters in public, and the question this scribe (lawyer) asked was one that was often debated by the Jews. It was a good question asked with a bad motive, because the lawyer hoped to trap our Lord. However, Jesus trapped the lawyer!

Our Lord sent the man back to the law, not because the law saves us (Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:21), but because the law shows us that we need to be saved. There can be no real conversion without conviction, and the law is what God uses to convict sinners (Rom. 3:20).

The scribe gave the right answer, but he would not apply it personally to

himself and admit his own lack of love for both God and his neighbor. So, instead of *being justified* by throwing himself on the mercy of God (Luke 18:9–14), he tried to *justify himself* and wriggle out of his predicament. He used the old debating tactic: “Define your terms! What do you mean by ‘neighbor’? Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus did not say that this story was a parable, so it could well be the report of an actual occurrence. For Jesus to tell a story that made the Jews look bad and the Samaritans look good would either be dangerous or self-defeating. “You just made that up!” they could say. “We all know that nothing like that would ever happen!” So it is possible that some of His listeners, including the lawyer, knew that such a thing had really happened. Either way, the account is realistic.

The worst thing we can do with any parable, especially this one, is turn it into an allegory and make everything stand for something. The victim becomes the lost sinner who is half-dead (alive physically, dead spiritually), helplessly left on the road of life. The priest and Levite represent the law and the sacrifices, neither of which can save the sinner.

The Samaritan is Jesus Christ who saves the man, pays the bill, and promises to come again. The inn stands for the local church where believers are cared for, and the “two pence” are the two ordinances, baptism and Communion. If you take this approach to Scripture, you can make the Bible say almost anything you please, and you are sure to miss the messages God wants you to get.

The road from Jerusalem down to Jericho was indeed a dangerous one. Since the temple workers used it so much, you would have thought the Jews or Romans would have taken steps to make it safe. It is much easier to maintain a religious system than it is to improve the neighborhood.

Most of us can think up excuses for the priest and Levite as they ignored the victim. (Maybe we have used them ourselves!) The priest had been serving God at the temple all week and was anxious to get home. Perhaps the bandits were still lurking in the vicinity and using the victim as “bait.” Why take a chance?

Anyway, it was not his fault that the man was attacked. The road was busy, so somebody else was bound to come along and help the man. The priest left it to the Levite, and then the Levite did what the priest did—nothing! Such is the power of the bad example of a religious man.

By using a Samaritan as the hero, Jesus disarmed the Jews, for the Jews and Samaritans were enemies (John 4:9; 8:48). It was not a Jew helping a Samaritan but a Samaritan helping a Jew *who had been ignored by his fellow Jews!* The Samaritan loved those who hated him, risked his own life, spent his own money (two days' wages for a laborer), and was never publicly rewarded or honored as far as we know.

What the Samaritan did helps us better understand what it means to “show mercy” (Luke 10:37), and it also illustrates the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Samaritan identified with the needs of the stranger and had compassion on him. There was no logical reason why he should rearrange his plans and spend his money just to help an “enemy” in need, but mercy does not need reasons. Being an expert in the law, the scribe certainly knew that God required His people to show mercy, even to strangers and enemies (Ex. 23:4–5; Lev. 19:33–34; Mic. 6:8).

See how wisely Jesus “turned the tables” on the lawyer. Trying to evade responsibility, the man asked, “Who is my neighbor?” But Jesus asked, “Which of these three men was neighbor to the victim?” The big question is, “To whom can I be a neighbor?” and this has nothing to do with geography, citizenship, or race. Wherever people need us, there we can be neighbors and, like Jesus Christ, show mercy.

The lawyer wanted to discuss “neighbor” in a general way, but Jesus forced him to consider a specific man in need. How easy it is for us to talk about abstract ideals and fail to help solve concrete problems. We can discuss things like “poverty” and “job opportunities” and yet never personally help feed a hungry family or help somebody find a job.

Of course, the lawyer wanted to make the issue somewhat complex and philosophical, but Jesus made it simple and practical. He moved it from *duty* to *love*, from *debating* to *doing*. To be sure, our Lord was not condemning discussions or debates; He was only warning us not to use these things as excuses for doing nothing. Committees are not always committed!

One of my favorite D. L. Moody stories illustrates this point. Attending a convention in Indianapolis, Mr. Moody asked singer Ira Sankey to meet him at six o'clock one evening at a certain street corner. When Sankey arrived, Mr. Moody put him on a box and asked him to sing, and it was not long before a crowd gathered. Moody spoke briefly, inviting the crowd to follow him to the nearby opera house. Before long, the auditorium was filled, and the evangelist preached the gospel to the spiritually hungry people.

When the delegates to the convention started to arrive, Moody stopped preaching and said, "Now we must close as the brethren of the convention wish to come and to discuss the question, 'How to Reach the Masses.'" *Touché!*

We may read this passage and think only of "the high cost of caring," but it is far more costly *not* to care. The priest and the Levite lost far more by their neglect than the Samaritan did by his concern. They lost the opportunity to become better men and good stewards of what God had given them. They could have been a good influence in a bad world, but they chose to be a bad influence. *The Samaritan's one deed of mercy has inspired sacrificial ministry all over the world.* Never say that such ministry is wasted! God sees to it that no act of loving service in Christ's name is ever lost.

It all depends on your outlook. To the thieves, this traveling Jew was a victim to exploit, so they attacked him. To the priest and Levite, he was a nuisance to avoid, so they ignored him. But to the Samaritan, he was a neighbor to love and help, so he took care of him. What Jesus said to the lawyer, He says to us: "Go and *keep on doing it* likewise" (literal translation).

3. WORSHIPPERS: LISTENING TO THE LORD (10:38–42) Worship is at the heart of all that we are and all that we do in the Christian life. It is important that we be busy ambassadors, taking the message of the gospel to lost souls. It is also essential to be merciful Samaritans, seeking to help exploited and hurting people who need God’s mercy. But before we can represent Christ as we should, or imitate Him in our caring ministry, we must spend time with Him and learn from Him. We must “take time to be holy.”

Mary of Bethany is seen three times in the gospel record, and on each occasion, she is in the same place: at the feet of Jesus. She sat at His feet and listened to His Word (Luke 10:39), fell at His feet and shared her woe (John 11:32), and came to His feet and poured out her worship (John 12:3). It is interesting to note that in each of these instances, there is some kind of fragrance: in Luke 10, it is food; in John 11, it is death (John 11:39); and in John 12, it is perfume.

Mary and Martha are often contrasted as though each believer must make a choice: be a *worker* like Martha or a *worshipper* like Mary. Certainly our personalities and gifts are different, but that does not mean that the Christian life is an either/or situation. Charles Wesley said it perfectly in one of his hymns: Faithful to my Lord’s commands, I still would choose the better part; Serve with careful Martha’s hands, And loving Mary’s heart.

It seems evident that the Lord wants each of us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work. Blessed are the balanced!

Consider Martha’s situation. She received Jesus into her home *and then neglected Him as she prepared an elaborate meal that He did not need!* Certainly a meal was in order, but what we do *with* Christ is far more important than what we do *for* Christ. Again, it is not an either/or situation; it is a matter of balance. Mary had done her share of the work in the kitchen and then had gone

to “feed” on the Lord’s teachings. Martha felt neglected after Mary left the kitchen, and she began to complain and to suggest that neither the Lord nor Mary really cared!

Few things are as damaging to the Christian life as trying to work for Christ without taking time to commune with Christ. “For without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). Mary chose the better part, the part that could not be taken from her. She knew that she could not live “by bread alone” (Matt. 4:4).

Whenever we criticize others and pity ourselves because we feel overworked, we had better take time to examine our lives. Perhaps in all of our busyness, we have been ignoring the Lord. Martha’s problem was not that she had too much work to do, but that she allowed her work to distract her and pull her apart. She was trying to serve two masters! If serving Christ makes us difficult to live with, then something is terribly wrong with our service!

The key is to have the right priorities: Jesus Christ first, then others, then ourselves. It is vitally important that we spend time “at the feet of Jesus” every single day, letting Him share His Word with us. *The most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees.* Unless we meet Christ personally and privately each day, we will soon end up like Martha: busy but not blessed.

Often in my pastoral ministry, I have asked people with serious problems, “Tell me about your devotional life.” The usual response has been an embarrassed look, a bowed head, and the quiet confession, “I stopped reading my Bible and praying a long time ago.” And they wondered why they had problems!

According to John 12:1–2, Martha must have learned her lesson, for she prepared a feast for Jesus, the Twelve, and her brother and sister—that’s fifteen people—and *did not utter one word of complaint!* She had God’s peace in her heart because she had learned to sit at the feet of Jesus.

We are ambassadors, neighbors, and worshippers, these three, and the greatest of these is worshippers.

Blessed are the balanced.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ? A neighbor to others? A worshipper?
2. When we see the great need or harvest, what are we to pray for? What is our personal responsibility?
3. What does each of these joys from 10:17–24 mean: The joy of service? Salvation? Sovereignty? Which of them have you experienced, and how?
4. Why is the salvation of a soul a greater miracle than healings and casting out demons?
5. When the lawyer asked Jesus what he could do to inherit eternal life, why did Jesus direct him to the Law?

6. Why were the actions of the Good Samaritan so shocking to the Jews?
7. Who is your neighbor? What do you need to do for your neighbor? Why does being a neighbor involve sacrifice?
8. How do we go about balancing work and worship?
9. What does “take time to be holy” mean to you? How are you doing in this area?
10. How do you keep busyness under control in your life?

Chapter Ten

Learning Life's Lessons

(Luke 11)

Our Lord's teaching in Luke 11 grew out of a prayer meeting, a miracle, and an invitation to dinner. Jesus used these occasions to give instructions about four important topics: prayer, Satan, spiritual opportunity, and hypocrisy. It is important that we today understand these topics and apply these truths to our own lives.

1. PRAYER (11:1–13)

The priority of prayer (v. 1). We usually think of John the Baptist as a prophet and martyr, and yet our Lord's disciples remembered him as a man of prayer. John was a “miracle baby,” filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born, and yet he had to pray. He was privileged to introduce the Messiah to Israel, and yet he had to pray. Jesus said that John was the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:28), and yet John had to depend on prayer. If prayer was that vital to a man who had these many advantages, how much more important it ought to be to us who do not have these advantages!

John's disciples had to pray, and Jesus' disciples wanted to learn better how to pray. They did not ask the Master to teach them how to preach or do great signs; they asked Him to teach them to pray. We today sometimes think that we

would be better Christians if only we had been with Jesus when He was on earth, but this is not likely. The disciples were with him and yet they failed many times! They could perform miracles, and yet they wanted to learn to pray.

But the greatest argument for the priority of prayer is the fact that our Lord was a Man of prayer. Thus far we have seen that He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21), before He chose the Twelve (Luke 6:12), when the crowds increased (Luke 5:16), before He asked the Twelve for their confession of faith (Luke 9:18), and at His transfiguration (Luke 9:29). The disciples knew that He often prayed alone (Mark 1:35), and they wanted to learn from Him this secret of spiritual power and wisdom.

If Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, had to depend on prayer during “the days of his flesh” (Heb. 5:7), then how much more do you and I need to pray! Effective prayer is the provision for every need and the solution for every problem.

Pattern for prayer (vv. 2–4). We call this “the Lord’s Prayer,” not because Jesus prayed it (He never had to ask for forgiveness), but because Jesus taught it. There is nothing wrong with praying this prayer personally or as part of a congregation, so long as we do it from a believing heart that is sincere and submitted. How easy it is to “recite” these words and not really mean them, but that can happen even when we sing and preach! The fault lies with us, not with this prayer.

This is a “pattern prayer,” given to guide us in our own praying (see Matt. 6:9–15 for the parallel). It teaches us that true prayer depends on a spiritual relationship with God that enables us to call Him “Father,” and this can come only through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:1–7).

Lyndon Johnson’s press secretary, Bill Moyers, was saying grace at a staff lunch, and the president shouted, “Speak up, Bill! I can’t hear a thing!” Moyers quietly replied, “I wasn’t addressing you, Mr. President.” It is good to remind ourselves that when we pray, we talk to God.

True prayer also involves *responsibilities*: honoring God's kingdom and doing God's will (Luke 11:2). It has well been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth. Prayer is not telling God what we want and then selfishly enjoying it. Prayer is asking God to use us to accomplish *what He wants* so that His name is glorified; His kingdom is extended and strengthened; and His will is done. I must test all of my personal requests by these overruling concerns if I expect God to hear and answer my prayers.

It is important for Christians to know the Word of God, for there we discover the will of God. We must never separate prayer and the Word (John 15:7). During my ministry, I have seen professing Christians disobey God and defend themselves by saying, "I prayed about it and God said it was all right!" This includes a woman who married an unsaved man (2 Cor. 6:14–18), a fellow living with a woman who was not his wife (1 Thess. 4:1–8), and a preacher who started his own church because all the other churches were wrong and only he had true "spiritual insight" (Phil. 2:1–16).

Once we are secure in our relationship with God and His will, then we can bring our *requests* to Him (Luke 11:3–4). We can ask Him to provide our needs (not our greeds!) for today, to forgive us for what we have done yesterday, and to lead us in the future. All of our needs may be included in these three requests: material and physical provision, moral and spiritual perfection, and divine protection and direction. If we pray this way, we can be sure of praying in God's will.

Persistence in prayer (vv. 5–8). In this parable, Jesus did not say that God is like this grouchy neighbor. In fact, He said just the opposite. If a tired and selfish neighbor finally meets the needs of a bothersome friend, how much more will a loving heavenly Father meet the needs of His own dear children! He is arguing from the lesser to the greater.

We have already seen that prayer is based on *sonship* ("Our Father"), not on

friendship, but Jesus used friendship to illustrate persistence in prayer. God the Father is not like this neighbor, for He never sleeps, never gets impatient or irritable, is always generous, and delights in meeting the needs of His children. The friend at the door had to keep on knocking in order to get what he needed, but God is quick to respond to His children's cries (Luke 18:1–8).

The argument is clear. If persistence finally paid off as a man beat on the door of a reluctant friend, how much more would persistence bring blessing as we pray to a loving heavenly Father! After all, we are the children *in the house with Him!*

The word translated “importunity” means “shamelessness” or “avoidance of shame.” It can refer to the man at the door who was not ashamed to wake up his friend, but it can also refer to the friend in the house. Hospitality to strangers is a basic law in the East (Gen. 18:1ff.). If a person refused to entertain a guest, he brought disgrace on the whole village and the neighbors would have nothing to do with him. The man in the house knew this and did not want to embarrass himself, his family, or his village, so he got up and met the need.

Why does our Father in heaven answer prayer? Not just to meet the needs of His children, but to meet them in such a way that it brings glory to His name. “Hallowed be thy name.” *When God's people pray, God's reputation is at stake.* The way He takes care of His children is a witness to the world that He can be trusted. Phillips Brooks said that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of His highest willingness. Persistence in prayer is not an attempt to change God's mind (“thy will be done”) but to get ourselves to the place where He can trust us with the answer.

Promises for prayer (vv. 9–13). The tenses of the verbs are important here: “Keep on asking ... keep on seeking ... keep on knocking.” In other words, don't come to God only in the midnight emergencies, but keep in constant communion with your Father. Jesus called this “abiding” (John 15:1ff.), and Paul exhorted, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). As we pray, God will either

answer or show us why He cannot answer. Then it is up to us to do whatever is necessary in our lives so that the Father can trust us with the answer.

Note that the lesson closes with an emphasis on God as Father (Luke 11:11–13). Because He knows us and loves us, *we never need to be afraid of the answers that He gives*. Again, Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater: if an earthly father gives what is best to his children, surely the Father in heaven will do even more. This even includes “the good things of the Holy Spirit” (compare Luke 11:13 with Matt. 7:11), blessings that in the Old Testament were reserved only for a special few.

2. SATAN (11:14–28)

Accusation (vv. 14–16). This is the third miracle of deliverance our Lord performed that elicited from His enemies the accusation that He was in league with Satan (see Matt. 9:32–34; 12:22–37). Instead of rejoicing that God had sent a Redeemer, the religious leaders were rebelling against the truth of God’s Word and seeking to discredit Christ’s work and character. Imagine people being so blind that they could not distinguish a work of God from a work of Satan!

“Beelzebub” was one of the names of the Philistine god Baal (2 Kings 1:1–3); it means “lord of flies.” A variant is “Beelzebul,” which means “lord of the dwelling” and ties in with Christ’s illustrations in Luke 11:18–26. The Jews often used this name when referring to Satan.

The request in Luke 11:16 was a part of the accusation. “If you are really working for God,” they were saying in effect, “prove it by giving us a sign from heaven, not just a miracle on earth.” They were tempting God, which is a dangerous thing to do.

Refutation (vv. 17–22). Jesus answered their charges with three arguments. First, their accusation was illogical. Why would Satan fight against himself and divide his own kingdom? (Note that Jesus believed in a real Devil who has a

kingdom that is strong and united. See Eph. 2:1–3; 6:10ff.) Second, their charges were self-incriminating: By what power were the Jews casting out demons? How do their works differ from Christ’s works? On the contrary, Christ’s miracles show that the kingdom of *God* is present, not the kingdom of *Satan*!

Finally, their accusation was really an admission of His power, for He could not defeat Satan unless He were stronger than Satan. Jesus pictured Satan as a strong man in armor, guarding his palace and his goods. But Jesus invaded Satan’s territory, destroyed his armor and weapons, and claimed his spoils (see John 12:31–33; Col. 2:15; 1 John 3:8). Our Lord has “led captivity captive” (Eph. 4:8) and set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18). Though he is permitted limited authority, Satan is a defeated enemy.

Application (vv. 23–28). It is impossible to be neutral in this spiritual war (Luke 11:23; see also 9:50), for neutrality means standing against Him. There are two spiritual forces at work in the world, and we must choose between them. Satan is scattering and destroying, but Jesus Christ is gathering and building. We must make a choice, and if we choose to make *no* choice, we are really choosing against Him.

Jesus illustrated the danger of neutrality by telling the story of the man and the demon. The man’s body was the demon’s “house” (Luke 11:24; and note vv. 17 and 21). For some unknown reason, the demonic tenant decided to leave his “house” and go elsewhere. The man’s condition improved immediately, *but the man did not invite God to come and dwell within*. In other words, the man remained neutral. What happened? The demon returned with seven other demons worse than himself, and the man’s condition was abominable.

“Neutrality in religion is always cowardice,” wrote Oswald Chambers. “God turns the cowardice of a desired neutrality into terror.”

Taking sides with Jesus means much more than saying the right things, like the woman who cried, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts

which nursed You” (Luke 11:27 NKJV). She was certainly sincere, but that was not enough. *We take sides with Jesus Christ when we hear His Word and obey it* (see Luke 6:46–49; 8:19–21).

3. OPPORTUNITY (11:29–36)

Because He knew what was in their hearts, Jesus was not impressed by the big crowds, but the disciples were. In order to keep the Twelve from being swayed by “success,” Jesus gave them some insights into what was really happening as they ministered the Word. He used three illustrations to show the seriousness of spiritual opportunities.

(1) Jonah (vv. 29–30, 32). The leaders kept asking Jesus for a sign to prove that He was the Messiah. The only sign He promised was “the sign of Jonah the prophet,” which is *death, burial, and resurrection*. It is the resurrection of our Lord that proves He is the Messiah, the Son of God (Rom. 1:4), and this is what Peter preached to Israel on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22ff.). The witness of the early church was centered on Christ’s resurrection (Acts 1:22; 3:15; 5:30–32; 13:32–33). Jonah was a living miracle and so is our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) Solomon (v. 31). The emphasis here is on the wisdom of a king, not the works of a prophet. The Queen of Sheba traveled many miles to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10), but here was the very Son of God *in their midst*, and the Jews would not believe His words! Even if Jesus had performed a sign, it would not have changed their hearts. They needed the living wisdom of God, but they were content with their stale religious tradition.

The important thing about these illustrations is that *they involved Gentiles*. When Jonah preached to the Gentiles in Nineveh, they repented and were spared. When a Gentile queen heard Solomon’s wisdom, she marveled and believed. If, with all their privileges, the Jews did not repent, then the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba would bear witness against them in the last judgment. The

Lord gave Israel so many opportunities, yet they would not believe (Luke 13:34–35; John 12:35–41).

(3) Light (vv. 33–36). The third illustration was from daily life, not from history, and was one Jesus had used before (Matt. 6:22–23). God’s Word is a light that shines in this dark world (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23). But it is not enough that the light be shining *externally*, it must enter our lives before it can do any good. “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Ps. 119:130). The brightest sun cannot enable a blind man to see.

When we trust Jesus Christ, our eyes are opened, the light shines in, and we become children of light (John 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:3–6; Eph. 5:8–14). The important thing is that we take advantage of the light and have a *single outlook of faith*. If we keep one eye on the things of God and the other eye on the world (1 John 2:16), the light will turn into darkness! There is no “twilight living” for the Christian, for God demands total submission and obedience (Luke 11:23).

Three men in the Bible illustrate this truth. They began in the light and ended up in the darkness because they were double-minded. The name *Samson* probably means “sunny,” yet he ended up a blind slave in a dark dungeon because he yielded to the “lust of the flesh” (Judg. 16). Lot began as a pilgrim with his uncle Abraham. He ended as a drunk in a cave, committing incest (Gen. 19:30–38), because he yielded to “the lust of the eyes” (Gen. 13:10–11). Lot wanted to serve two masters and look in two directions!

King Saul began his reign as a humble leader, but his pride led him to a witch’s cave (1 Sam. 28), and he died of suicide on the field of battle (1 Sam. 31). His sin was “the pride of life”; he would not humble himself and obey the will of God.

Each of us is controlled either by light or darkness. The frightening thing is that some people have so hardened themselves against the Lord that *they cannot tell the difference!* They think they are following the light when, in reality, they are following the darkness. The scribes and Pharisees claimed to “see the light”

as they studied the law, but they were living in the darkness (see John 12:35–50).

4. HYPOCRISY (11:37–54)

At this stage in Christ's ministry, when the religious leaders were bent on destroying Him, why would a Pharisee invite Him to his home for a meal? If he had been sincerely seeking truth, he would have talked with our Lord privately. It seems obvious that he was looking for an opportunity to accuse Jesus, and he thought he had it when Jesus did not practice the ceremonial washing before eating (Mark 7:2–3). Knowing what the host was thinking, Jesus responded by giving a “spiritual analysis” of the Pharisees.

He exposed their folly (vv. 37–41). The basic error of the Pharisees was thinking that righteousness was only a matter of external actions, and they minimized internal attitudes. They were very careful to keep the outside clean, but they ignored the wickedness within. They seemed to forget that the same God who created the outside also created the inside, the “inner person” that also needs cleansing (Ps. 51:6, 10).

The Pharisees boasted of their giving (Matt. 6:1–4; Luke 18:11–12), but they did not give *what was within* to the Lord. The way to make the *outside* pure is to make the *inside* pure (Luke 11:41). Kenneth Wuest translates this verse, “Rather, the things which are inside give as alms, and behold, all things are clean to you” (WUEST). The way to clean up a dirty vocabulary is not to brush your teeth but to cleanse your heart.

He denounced their sins (vv. 42–52). These six “woes” parallel the “woes” in Matthew 23. Jesus started with the sins of the Pharisees (Luke 11:42–44) and then turned to the sins of the scribes, for it was their interpretations of the law that formed the basis for the whole pharisaical system (Luke 11:45–52).

The first three “woes” denounce the Pharisees for their *wrong priorities*. They were careful about tithing even the tiny leaves and seeds from the herbs,

but they forgot about important things like justice and love (Mic. 6:7–8). They majored on the minors! Jesus did not say they should stop tithing but that they should put their religious activities into proper perspective.

They also put *reputation* above *character*. They thought that sitting in the right seats and being acknowledged by the right people would make them spiritual. Reputation is what people think we are; character is what God knows we are.

The comparison in Luke 11:44 must have infuriated the host and the other Pharisees who were present. The Jews had to be especially careful about ceremonial defilement from dead bodies (Num. 19:11–22; note especially v. 16), so they made sure the graves were carefully marked. But the Pharisees were like *unmarked graves* that did not look like graves at all! This meant that they were *unconsciously defiling others when they thought they were helping them become holier!* Instead of helping people, the Pharisees were harming them.

The scribes felt the sting of our Lord's words and tried to defend themselves. Jesus used three vivid illustrations in answering them: burdens, tombs, and keys.

The scribes were good at adding to the burdens of the people, but they had no heart for helping them carry those burdens. What a tragedy when “ministers” of God's Word create more problems for people who already have problems enough! A pastor friend of mine prays daily, “Lord, help me today not to add to anybody's problems.” Jesus had these “religious burdens” in mind when He gave the gracious invitation recorded in Matthew 11:28–30.

The scribes were also good at “embalming” the past and honoring the prophets who had been martyred by the religious establishment *to which they belonged*. Both Bible history and church history reveal that true servants of God are usually rejected by the people who most need their ministry, but the next generation will come along and honor these people. The Pharisees were like “hidden graves,” but the scribes built elaborate tombs!

The first recorded martyrdom in the Old Testament is that of Abel, and the

last is that of Zechariah (see Gen. 4:1–15; 2 Chron. 24:20–27, and remember that 2 Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Bible). Jesus did not suggest that the scribes and Pharisees were *personally* responsible for killing the Old Testament prophets. Rather, He was affirming that *people just like the scribes and Pharisees* did these terrible things to God’s servants. Their ultimate crime would be the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Finally, the scribes were guilty of robbing the common people of the knowledge of the Word of God. It was bad enough that they would not enter the kingdom themselves, but they were hindering others from going in! It is a serious thing to teach God’s Word, and not everyone is supposed to do it (James 3:1). Unfortunately, what some people call “Bible study” is too often just a group of unprepared people exchanging their ignorance.

But there is another side to this: The scribes convinced the people that nobody could understand and explain the law except the trained and authorized teachers. We have some of that arrogant attitude showing itself today. Teachers who overemphasize the Bible languages give people the impression that the Holy Spirit cannot teach anyone who does not know Greek and Hebrew. There are so many “study Bibles” these days (and many of them are helpful) that you wonder if a student can learn anything from a simple text Bible. We must not despise true Christian scholarship, but we must also keep things in balance.

Jesus is the key to the Scriptures (Luke 24:44–48). When you take away that key, you cannot understand what God has written. As helpful and necessary as theological studies are, the most important requirements for Bible study are a yielded heart and an obedient will. Some of the best Bible teachers I have known in my own ministry were men and women who learned the truth of God’s Word on their knees and on the battlefield of life. They were Spirit-taught, not man-taught.

He aroused their anger (vv. 53–54). Hypocrites do not want their sins exposed; it hurts their reputation. Instead of opposing the Lord, these men should

have been seeking His mercy. They deliberately began to attack Him with “catch questions” in hopes they could trap Him in some heresy and then arrest Him. What a disgraceful way to treat the Son of God!

But there are religious systems today that are very much like the system defended by the scribes and Pharisees. The leaders interpret and apply the Word for the followers, and you are not permitted to ask embarrassing questions or raise objections. The leaders exploit the people and do little or nothing to ease their burdens. Worst of all, the leaders use the system to cover up their own sins. God’s truth should set us free, but these groups only lead people into more and more bondage.

God has given teachers to His church (Eph. 4:11), and we should listen to them. But we should also test what we hear by the Scriptures to make sure they are teaching the truth (1 Thess. 5:19–21), and we should not permit anyone to bring us into bondage and exploit us (2 Cor. 11:20).

It is a privilege to have the light of the Word of God and the privilege of prayer. The enemy wants to rob us of the blessings of spiritual growth and freedom. His plan is to substitute hypocrisy for reality and to encourage us to be more concerned about the outside than the inside: reputation and not character.

So serious is this danger that Jesus will have more to say about it in Luke 12. Meanwhile, let us beware!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What reasons for prayer do you find in Luke 11:13 and in Wiersbe’s

discussion of this section?

2. What does the Lord's Prayer teach us about how to pray?
3. How does our responsibility to honor God's kingdom and do His will affect what we pray for and how?
4. What are some things that we know are God's will, and therefore good to pray for?
5. In the parable on persistence, what does Jesus teach about prayer? How is God unlike the neighbor in the parable?
6. What does it mean for you to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking?
7. In spiritual warfare, what would it look like for a person to be neutral? Why is neutrality really a choice against Jesus Christ?
8. How were the Pharisees foolish, according to Jesus (11:37–41)? Why is this folly tempting even for Christians?

9. Which sins of the Pharisees and scribes did Jesus denounce?

10. Do you see yourself anywhere in the Pharisees' folly and sins? If so, where?

Chapter Eleven

Believer, Beware!

(Luke 12)

Our Lord's disciples may not have realized it, but they were in great danger. For one thing, they were surrounded by immense crowds of people whose major concern was not to hear spiritual truth but to see Jesus do a miracle or meet some personal need. At the same time, the scribes and Pharisees were plotting against Jesus and trying to get Him out of the way. The snare of popularity and the fear of man has brought ruin to more than one servant of God.

In Luke 12, Luke recorded five warnings from our Lord. Four of these warnings must be heeded by God's people today if we are to be faithful disciples, and the fifth warning should be heeded by a lost world.

1. BEWARE OF HYPOCRISY (12:1–12) The word *hypocrite* comes from a Greek word that means “an actor,” “one who plays a part.” There are hypocrites in every walk of life, people who try to impress others in order to hide their real selves. In the Christian life, a hypocrite is somebody who tries to appear more spiritual than he or she really is. These people know that they are pretending, and they hope they will not be found out. Their Christian life is only a shallow masquerade.

It is easy to see why Jesus gave this warning at this particular time. The disciples might be tempted either to gain popularity by pleasing the crowds, or avoid trouble by pleasing the scribes and Pharisees. All of us want people to like us, and it seems such an easy thing to “act the part” that others want to see.

How can we keep hypocrisy out of our lives?

We must understand what hypocrisy really is (v. 1). Jesus compared it to leaven (yeast), something that every Jew would associate with evil. (See Ex. 12:15–20. Paul also used leaven to symbolize sin. See 1 Cor. 5:6–8; Gal. 5:9.) Like yeast, hypocrisy begins very small but grows quickly and quietly. As it grows, it infects the whole person. Hypocrisy does to the ego what yeast does to bread dough: It puffs it up (see 1 Cor. 4:6, 18–19; 5:2). Soon pride takes over and the person’s character deteriorates rapidly.

If we want to keep hypocrisy out of our lives, we must avoid that first bit of “leaven.” Once we start to pretend, the process goes on quickly, and the longer we wait, the worse it gets. Sir Walter Scott wrote: O what a tangled web we weave When first we practice to deceive.

Hypocrisy is foolish and futile (vv. 2–3). Why? Because nothing can really be hidden. Jesus referred here primarily to His own teachings, but the principle applies to other areas of life. The Twelve might be tempted to cover or compromise the truth so that neither the crowds nor the Pharisees would be offended (see Luke 8:16–18; 11:33). God’s truth is like light, not leaven, and it must not be hidden. The lies of the hypocrite will one day be revealed, so why go on pretending? Let your light shine!

We must understand what causes hypocrisy (vv. 4–7). Jesus mentioned “fear” five times in these verses, so He is teaching us that a basic cause of hypocrisy is *the fear of man*. When we are afraid of what others may say about us or do to us, then we try to impress them in order to gain their approval. If necessary, we will even lie to accomplish our purposes, and this is hypocrisy. Unfortunately, many of the scribes and Pharisees were more concerned about

reputation than character, what people *thought* about them than what God *knew* about them. The fear of man always brings a snare (Prov. 29:25), and Jesus wanted His disciples to avoid that snare.

The remedy for hypocrisy is to forget about what people may say and do and *fear God alone*. The fear of God is the fear that conquers all other fears, for the person who truly fears God need fear nothing else. All that men can do is kill the body, but God can condemn the soul! Since He is the final Judge, and He judges for eternity, it is logical that we put the fear of God ahead of everything else. Our God knows us and cares for us. He cares for the sparrows, and we are of more value than they, so what do we have to fear from men?

We must confess Christ openly (vv. 8–9). Once we have done this, we will have an easier time living the truth and avoiding hypocrisy. How can we fear men when we know Jesus Christ is confessing us before the Father in heaven? It is not important that men praise our names on earth, but it is important that God acknowledges us in heaven (see 2 Tim. 2:8–14).

We must depend on the Holy Spirit (vv. 10–12). Jesus appears to be contradicting Himself. In Luke 12:8–9, He demands that we openly confess Him, but in Luke 12:10, He says we can speak against Him and be forgiven. However, if we speak against the Spirit, there is no forgiveness! Does this mean that the Holy Spirit is more important than the Son of God?

Note that this statement is connected with the ministry of the Spirit in and through the apostles (Luke 12:11–12). The Jewish nation rejected *God the Father* when they refused to obey John the Baptist and repent, for John was sent by the Father. They rejected *God the Son* when they asked Pilate to crucify Him. But that sin could be forgiven because there was still the ministry of the Spirit.

God did not judge the nation immediately. Instead, Jesus prayed for them as He hung on the cross (Luke 23:34; see also Acts 3:17). Then God sent the Holy Spirit, who ministered through the apostles and other believers in the church. *This was the last opportunity for the nation, and they failed by rejecting the*

witness of the Spirit (Acts 7:51). Luke 12:11–12 was fulfilled during the first chapters of Acts, when the message went “to the Jew first” (Acts 3:26; 13:46; Rom. 1:16). Israel’s third “national sin” was the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), after which the message went out to the Samaritans (Acts 8), and then the Gentiles (Acts 10). Note that Stephen said, “You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51 NIV).

I do not believe that the “sin against the Holy Spirit” is committed by people today as it was by Israel centuries ago. I believe that the only “unpardonable sin” today is the final rejection of Jesus Christ (John 3:36). The Spirit of God witnesses through the Word, and it is possible for sinners to reject that witness and resist the Spirit. But the Spirit bears witness to Christ (John 16:7–15), so the way people treat the Spirit is the way they treat the Son of God.

2. BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS (12:13–21) At this point, a man in the crowd interrupted Jesus and asked Him to solve a family problem. Rabbis were expected to help settle legal matters, but Jesus refused to get involved. Why? Because He knew that no answer He gave would solve the *real* problem, which was covetousness in the hearts of the two brothers. (The “you” in Luke 12:14 is plural.) As long as both men were greedy, *no* settlement would be satisfactory. Their greatest need was to have their hearts changed. Like too many people today, they wanted Jesus to serve them but not to save them.

Covetousness is an unquenchable thirst for getting more and more of something we think we need in order to be truly satisfied. It may be a thirst for money or the things that money can buy, or even a thirst for position and power. Jesus made it clear that true life does not depend on an abundance of possessions. He did not deny that we have certain basic needs (Matt. 6:32;

1 Tim. 6:17). He only affirmed that we will not make life richer by acquiring *more* of these things.

Mark Twain once defined “civilization” as “a limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities,” and he was right. In fact, many Christians are infected with covetousness and do not know it. They think that Paul’s admonition in 1 Timothy 6 applies only to the “rich and famous.” Measured by the living standards of the rest of the world, most believers in America are indeed wealthy people.

Jesus told this parable to reveal the dangers that lurk in a covetous heart. As you read it, test your own responses to this farmer’s various experiences.

How do you respond to the wealthy farmer’s *dilemma*? Here was a man who had a problem with too much wealth! If we say, “I certainly wish I had that problem!” we may be revealing covetousness in our hearts. If suddenly you inherited a great deal of wealth, would it create a problem for you? Or would you simply praise God and ask Him what He wanted you to do with it?

There are perils to prosperity (Prov. 30:7–9). Wealth can choke the Word of God (Matt. 13:22), create snares and temptations (1 Tim. 6:6–10, 17–19), and give you a false sense of security. People say that money does not satisfy, but it does satisfy *if you want to live on that level*. People who are satisfied only with the things that money can buy are in great danger of losing the things that money cannot buy.

This farmer saw his wealth as an opportunity to please himself. He had no thoughts of others or of God.

How do you respond to the *decisions* of the rich man? Are you saying, “Now that is shrewd business! Save and have it ready for the future!” But Jesus saw selfishness in all that this man did (note the eleven personal pronouns), and He said the man was a fool. The world’s philosophy is “Take care of Number One!” But Jesus does not endorse that philosophy.

There is certainly nothing wrong with following good business principles, or

even with saving for the future (1 Tim. 5:8). Jesus does not encourage waste (John 6:12). But neither does He encourage selfishness motivated by covetousness.

How do you respond to the farmer's *desires*? Are you saying, "This is the life! The man has success, satisfaction, and security! What more could he want?" But Jesus did not see this farmer enjoying life; He saw him facing death! Wealth cannot keep us alive when our time comes to die, nor can it buy back the opportunities we missed while we were thinking of ourselves and ignoring God and others.

Jesus made it clear that true life does not come from an abundance of things, nor do true success or security. This man had a false view of both life and death. He thought that life came from accumulating things, and that death was far away. On March 11, 1856, Henry David Thoreau wrote in his journal, "That man is the richest whose pleasures are cheapest." He also said, "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone."

Finally, how do you respond to the *death* of the boastful farmer? We are prone to say, "Too bad this fellow died just when he had everything going for him! How tragic that he could not finish his great plans." But the greatest tragedy is not what the man left behind but what lay *before* him: eternity without God! The man lived without God and died without God, and his wealth was but an incident in his life. God is not impressed with our money.

What does it mean to be "rich toward God"? It means to acknowledge gratefully that everything we have comes from God, and then make an effort to use what He gives us for the good of others and the glory of God. Wealth can be *enjoyed* and *employed* at the same time if our purpose is to honor God (1 Tim. 6:10ff.). To be rich toward God means spiritual enrichment, not just personal enjoyment. How tragic when people are rich in this world but poor in the next (see Matt. 6:19–34)!

3. BEWARE OF WORRYING (12:22–34) The rich farmer worried because he had too much, but the disciples might be tempted to worry because they did not have enough! They had given up all they had in order to follow Christ. They were living by faith, and faith is always tested.

Worry is destructive. The word translated “anxious” in Luke 12:22 means “to be torn apart,” and the phrase “doubtful mind” (Luke 12:29) means “to be held in suspense.” It is the picture of a ship being tossed in a storm. Our English word *worry* comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word that means “to strangle.” “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow,” said Corrie ten Boom, “it empties today of its strength.”

Worry is also deceptive. It gives us a false view of life, of itself, and of God. Worry convinces us that life is made up of what we eat and what we wear. We get so concerned about *the means* that we totally forget about *the end*, which is to glorify God (Matt. 6:33). There is a great difference between making a living and making a life.

Worry blinds us to the world around us and the way God cares for His creation. God makes the flowers beautiful, and He even feeds the unclean ravens, who have no ability to sow or reap. He ought to be able to care for men *to whom He has given the ability to work*. Jesus was not suggesting that we sit around and let God feed us, for the birds themselves work hard to stay alive. Rather, He encourages us to trust Him and cooperate with Him in using the abilities and opportunities that He gives us (2 Thess. 3:6–15).

But worry even blinds us to itself. We can get to the place where we actually think that worry accomplishes good things in our lives! In Luke 12:25, Jesus pointed out that our worries do not add one extra minute to our lives (Ps. 39:5) or one extra inch to our height. The rich farmer’s fretting certainly did not lengthen his life! Instead of adding to our lives, our worries take away from our

lives. People can worry themselves into the hospital or into the grave!

Once again, Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater. If God feeds the birds, He will surely feed His children. If He beautifies the plants that grow up one day and are cut down the next, surely He will clothe His own people. The problem is not His little power, for He can do anything; the problem is our little faith.

Worry is deformative. It keeps us from growing, and it makes us like the unsaved in the world (Luke 12:30). In short, worry is unchristian; worry is a sin. How can we witness to a lost world and encourage them to put faith in Jesus Christ if we ourselves are doubting God and worrying? Is it not inconsistent to preach faith and yet not practice it? Late chaplain of the United States Senate Peter Marshall once prayed “that ulcers would not become the badge of our faith.” Too often they are!

How do we win over worry? The first step is to realize that *God knows our needs*, so we can trust Him to meet them. We are sheep in His little flock, children in His family, and servants in His kingdom, and He will see to it that our needs are fully met. It is His *pleasure* to give us His kingdom, so will He not give us everything that we need (see Rom. 8:32)?

But God’s pleasures and our treasures must go together. We must look at earth from heaven’s point of view and make sure that we put God’s kingdom first in everything. The main question is, “Where is your heart?” If our hearts are fixed on the transient things of earth, then we will always worry. But if we are fixed on the eternal, then God’s peace will guard our minds and hearts (Phil. 4:6–9). We must “hang loose” when it comes to this world’s goods, and be willing even to sell what we have in order to help others (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35). It is not wrong to own things so long as things do not own us.

4. BEWARE OF CARELESSNESS (12:35–53) Jesus shifted the emphasis

from being worried about the present to being watchful about the future. The themes in Luke 12 all go together, for one of the best ways to conquer hypocrisy, covetousness, and worry is to look for the Lord's return. When you are "living in the future tense," it is difficult for the things of the world to ensnare you. In this section, Jesus explained how we can be ready for His return.

Waiting and watching (vv. 35–40). Jewish weddings were held at night, and a bridegroom's servants would have to wait for their master to come home with his bride. The new husband would certainly not want to be kept waiting at the door with his bride! But the servants had to be sure they were ready to go to work, with their robes tucked under their girdles so they were free to move (see 1 Peter 1:13ff.).

But the remarkable thing in this story is that the master serves the servants! In Jewish weddings, the bride was treated like a queen and the groom like a king, so you would not expect the "king" to minister to his staff. Our King will minister to His faithful servants when He greets us at His return, and He will reward us for our faithfulness.

To "watch" means to be alert, to be ready, not to be caught by surprise. That is the attitude we must have toward the second coming of Jesus Christ. His coming will be like that of a thief: unannounced and unexpected (Matt. 24:43; 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 16:15). We must be ready!

The saintly Presbyterian pastor Robert Murray McCheyne sometimes asked people, "Do you believe that Jesus is coming today?" If they replied in the negative, he would say, "Then you had better be ready, for He is coming at an hour when you think not!"

Working (vv. 41–48). Lest we get the idea that watching and waiting are all that He requires, Jesus added this parable to encourage us to be working when He comes. The apostles had a special responsibility to feed God's household, His church, but each of us has some work to do in this world, assigned to us by

the Lord. Our responsibility is to be faithful when He comes. We may not appear successful in our own eyes, or in the eyes of others, but that is not important. The thing God wants is faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2).

Once a believer starts to think his Master is *not* coming back, his life begins to deteriorate. Our relationship with others depends on our relationship to the Lord, so if we stop looking for Him, we will stop loving His people. The motive for Christian life and service must be a desire to please the Lord and be found faithful at His return.

I do not think that Luke 12:46 teaches that unfaithful believers lose their salvation, because our going to heaven depends on faith in Jesus Christ and not good works (Eph. 2:8–10; 2 Tim. 2:11–13). The phrase “cut him in sunder” means “cut him off, separate him,” and “unbelievers” can also be translated “unfaithful.” Our Lord will separate the faithful believers from the unfaithful; He will reward the faithful, but the unfaithful servants will lose their rewards (1 Cor. 3:13–15).

God’s judgment will be fair. It will be based on what the servants know of God’s will. This is not to suggest that the more ignorant we are, the easier time we will have at the judgment seat of Christ! We are admonished to know God’s will (Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:9) and to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Jesus is stating a general principle: The more we have from God, the greater our accountability before God.

Warring (vv. 49–53). As we wait, watch, and work, we will not have an easy time, because we are aliens in enemy territory. The images Jesus used—fire, baptism, division—speak of opposition and conflict. To the Jews, fire was a symbol of judgment, and our Lord’s coming into this world did bring judgment (John 9:39–41).

Our Lord’s “baptism” in Luke 12:50 refers to His suffering and death, which was pictured by His baptism in the Jordan. (See Ps. 42:7 and Jonah 2:3, and note His reference to Jonah in Luke 11:29–30.) The apostles certainly received a

baptism of suffering as they witnessed for Christ after Pentecost.

Luke opened his book announcing “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14), but now he has the Lord seemingly contradicting this promise. Jesus does give peace to those who trust Him (Rom. 5:1), but often their confession of faith becomes a declaration of war among their family and friends. Jesus is a cause of division (see John 7:12, 43; 9:16; 10:19). But even if there is not “peace on earth,” there is “peace in heaven” (Luke 19:38) because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

After instructing His disciples, Jesus turned and gave a final warning to the people around Him.

5. BEWARE OF SPIRITUAL DULLNESS (12:54–59) Jesus used two illustrations to impress on the crowds the importance of discernment and diligence in spiritual matters. First, He talked about the weather, and then He talked about a lawsuit.

(1) Discernment (vv. 54–57). If people were as discerning about spiritual things as they are about the weather, they would be better off! The crowd could predict a storm, but it could not foresee the coming judgment. It knew that the temperature was about to change, but it could not interpret the “signs of the times.” The Jewish nation had the prophetic Scriptures for centuries and should have known what God was doing, but their religious leaders led them astray.

How tragic that men today can predict the movements of the heavenly bodies, split atoms, and even put men on the moon, but they are blind to what God is doing in the world. They know how to get to the stars, but they do not know how to get to heaven! Our educated world possesses a great deal of scientific knowledge but not much spiritual wisdom.

(2) Diligence (vv. 58–59). Anyone will do whatever is necessary to stay out of prison, but how many people will apply that same concern and diligence to

stay out of hell? If lawyers and judges would examine God's Word as diligently as they examine their law books, they will gain a wisdom that the law cannot give.

The nation of Israel was marching to judgment, and the Judge was Almighty God, yet they would not seek for terms of peace (Luke 13:34–35). Jesus knew that the Roman armies would come to destroy the city and the temple (Luke 19:41–44), but He could not convince the people to repent. Their debt was mounting up, and they would pay the last mite.

We must apply these truths to our own lives personally. If we knew a storm was coming, we would prepare for it. If we knew the officer was coming to take us to court, we would get a lawyer and try to settle the case out of court. The storm of God's wrath is coming, and the Judge is already standing before the door (James 5:9).

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

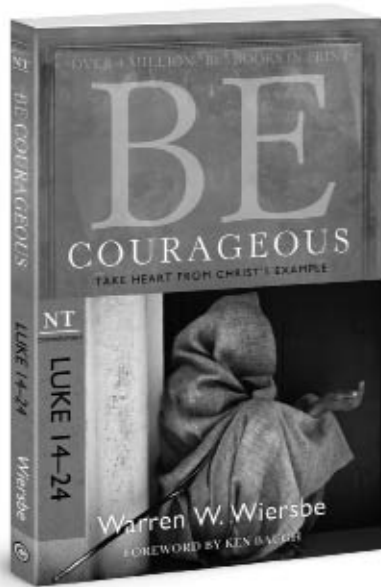
QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How would you define hypocrisy? When are you most tempted to try to appear to be something you are not?
2. How can we keep hypocrisy out of our lives?

3. What is the cause of hypocrisy?
4. What are the cures for hypocrisy? Why must these three cures work together?
5. What does Wiersbe believe is the only unpardonable sin today? What do you think about that?
6. Why is covetousness such a serious sin? (After all, it's "only" a desire, not an action.) 7. What do you think Jesus meant by being "rich toward God"?
8. Why is worry so dangerous to a Christian?
9. How can we have victory over worry?
10. How can discernment and diligence ward off spiritual dullness?
11. Which of the warnings in Luke 12 do you think God most wants you to heed right now?

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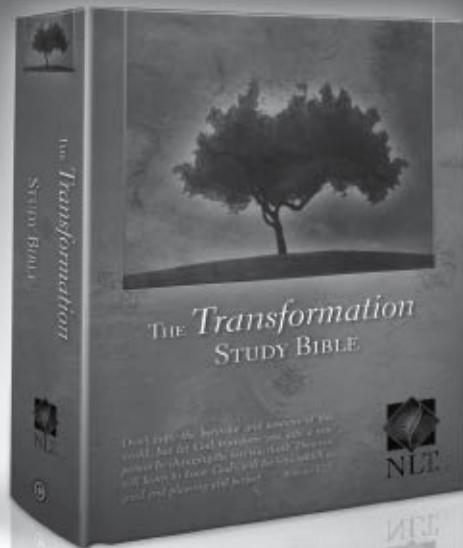
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