

GOSPEL HIGHWAY

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2015/6: Jesus, A Friend Of Sinners (Luke 7:34)

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Message One: Jesus and Levi

“The old is better”

Luke 5:27–39

We begin now a series of six messages drawn from six different passages from the Gospel of Luke. We must always be returning to the Gospels in our preaching and teaching, in our family devotions, and in our personal Bible reading. Where else do we learn of Christ but in the Scriptures?

We want to focus on one particular aspect of the inspired portrait of Jesus in the Gospels. It is an aspect that is given special emphasis in the Gospel of Luke. It is the presentation of Jesus as “the friend of sinners.”

Luke 7:33–34 articulates this theme. When Jesus describes the fickleness of the of the crowd who are like children in the marketplace, he says:

KJV Luke 7:33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. 34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!

Jesus is a friend of sinners! It is this theme that we come to meditate upon.

The centerpiece of our passage today is the narrative account of the calling of a disciple, a publican or tax collector, named Levi. Jesus then shares a meal with this man and other publicans (tax collectors), along with some scribes and Pharisees which includes a conversation in which Jesus is challenged about the practices of his disciples and in which he presents a parable to explain the significance of his appearance as the Messiah of God on the stage of history.

There are some very practical questions that flow from this passage, like:

- Why did Jesus when here on earth openly associate with notorious sinners?
- Should Christians today regularly engage in fasting?
- When Jesus came to earth did he come to introduce a new religion that was radically different from the ways that God had previously revealed himself to Israel or did he come to revive the old religion that had become corrupted through adding the traditions of men?

I. Exposition:

Jesus is still exercising his ministry in Galilee in the area around Capernaum where he has most recently miraculously healed two men, a leper and a paralytic.

So, in v. 27 we read, “After these things....” When it says “he saw a publican,” the verb for “to see” here is not the normal word for simply catching someone in the field of vision. Rather, the verb (*theaomai*) has the connotation of close notice or observation. One commentator suggests the rendering, “he fixed his eyes upon him” and even goes so far to speak of “a flash of divine sympathy” that occurred in that moment when Jesus saw this man (Godet, pp. 173–174).

The man is described as a “publican” in the AV. Most modern translations render this term as a “tax collector.” The historians all agree that these civil functionaries had as their lucrative task the collection of taxes from their fellow citizens that were given either to the tetrarch (this would mean Herod in Galilee at this time) or directly to the Romans. It was lucrative because there was regular skimming off the top for the tax collectors. It also meant quite naturally that such men were despised by the general populace. To be a publican in Galilee would be like being a pro-tax politician at a Tea Party (a conservative, anti-tax organization) gathering in the United States!

The man’s name is given by Luke as Levi. This was a good Jewish name. In Mark 2:14 he is identified as “Levi the son of Alphaeus.” In Matthew 9:9, however, the man is not called Levi but Matthew (one of

the twelve apostles and, as tradition holds, the author of the first canonical Gospel). How do we reconcile this? As Poole notes: “There was nothing more ordinary amongst the Jews than for persons to have two names.” Some have suggested that just as Simon was given the name Peter by Jesus as a nickname, so Levi was renamed “Matthew” (which means “the gift of God”) by our Lord himself (see Godet, p. 174).

This man is sitting there “at the receipt of the custom” when Jesus simply says to him, “Follow me.” This was apparently the original call of our Lord upon men who would become his disciples.

Notice it is not a request or a plea. There is not a “Oh, would you pretty, pretty please, do me the honor of following me, if it would not inconvenience you too much and if it does not conflict with too many other things in your life or commitments you have already made in other places.” No. It is a command. It is the language of a general spoken to a common soldier. One would not think of saying “No” to King Jesus when he calls.

So, in v. 28 we read the response told with weighty brevity: “And he left all, rose up, and followed him” (cf. v. 11). Just as Zebedee was left in the boat holding the nets as the sons strode off behind Christ, so Levi leaves the receipt of custom and any colleagues there to follow after Christ.

In v. 29 we read, “And Levi made a great feast in his own house....” We notice several things here:

1. Levi’s zeal to welcome Christ into his home and into his life.
2. The sense of joy and celebration at being found and called by Jesus. Levi did not invite Jesus by to sit in the dark and sing a dirge as he recollected all his sins. No! He invited Christ into his home for a feast and a celebration. If Christ has called us we ought to be glad and not constant sour-pusses!
3. Levi’s zeal to bring others into Christ’s presence. This as a theme in Luke (cf. 4:40; 5:18). Here the litter is not a bed but a feast to bring men before Christ.

4. Jesus sat down and shared with them on familiar terms. This is no aloof Messiah but a personal, gracious, and generous spirit. Do we know him in similar terms?

In v. 30 we learnt that among the “others” present are the scribes and the Pharisees. Luke says that they “murmured against his disciples.” The vivid verb here is *gonguzo*, the same word used in the Greek translation of the OT to render the murmuring of Israel in the wilderness against Moses. They criticize: “Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?” A later rabbinical tractate said that teachers of the law were not to have table communion with the *am-ha-arets* (the people of the land, meaning the people who did not know or properly observe the law as they taught it) (see Geldenhuys, p. 193).

Jesus perceives their murmurings (cf. v. 22) and answers, “They that are whole [healthy] need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (vv. 31–32).

This is a powerful analogy that Jesus draws. Physicians are not called upon to treat those who are enjoying good health. They are needed in hospitals visiting the patients who are suffering with desperate illnesses and who are in need of cure and treatment. Now, we should not think that Jesus was ceding to the scribes and Pharisees that they were in fact “righteous.” No, he was exposing their own hardness of heart. Here are publicans who know that they are sinners and who know their desperate need for Christ. And here are scribes and Pharisees who think they have gained a righteous standing by their religious striving and yet are blind to their true condition and their true need. They are like men dying of a fatal illness but who deny their sickness and deny their need for the physician’s care even as he stands before them.

Notice also the language of calling. What did Jesus come to do? He came to call sinners to repentance. What is this “call” but the effectual call that grips a man’s heart, opens his eyes to his true condition apart from Christ, fills his eyes with tears in godly sorrow and makes him desire to turn his back on his life of sin as he turns toward Christ in faith.

The second question comes in v. 33 and it again is aimed at criticism of the disciples: “Why do the disciples of John fast so often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?” According to Luke 7:34 Jesus was also accused of being a glutton and winebibber and friend of publican and sinners. The challenge here was why the disciples of Jesus did not engage in the spiritual discipline of denying themselves food to heighten their sense of sorrow for sin or need for God when other godly groups (John’s disciples and the Pharisees) did teach and practice such things. The accusation here is lack of piety and lack of seriousness.

In Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the publican going to the temple to pray in Luke 18, the Pharisee in self-justification prays, “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess” (v. 12) while the publican stand afar off, not even willing to lift his eyes, and beating his breast cries out, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Some suggest that the practice of the pious at the time was to fast on Monday and Thursday since tradition held that Moses went up to Sinai on Monday and returned on Thursday (see Tolbert, Luke, p. 34).

Jesus responds, “Can ye make the children of the bride-chamber [a Hebraism meaning the members of the wedding party and the wedding guests] fast, while the bridegroom is with them?” (v. 34). The analogy here is that Jesus is the bridegroom. This is, in fact, another place where Jesus is taking to himself one of the prerogatives of the God of the OT who revealed himself as being like a husband to his people. And his disciples are the bridal party. The point is that they recognize Jesus for who he is and they are responding appropriately in his presence, that is with joy and celebration; whereas, these scribes and Pharisees are blind to his true identity.

In v. 35 we have a powerful prophecy: “But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast in those days.” This raises an interesting and important point of interpretation. Is the reference here to the time of the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus when his disciples could not eat for grief and sorrow? Or does it refer to his being taken away in the ascension

implying that fasting is a norm for this present time between Christ's first and second comings?

In v. 36 for the first time in Luke's Gospel we have explicit reference to Jesus telling a parable. In fact, it might be argued that this is at least the third parable he has told at Levi's house, the first being the parable of the physician and the patients (v. 31) and the second being the parable of the bridegroom and the wedding party (vv. 34-35). Again, here, however, is specific reference to Jesus speaking a parable (which some define as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning). There are, in fact, we might say two parables Jesus uses here: the parable of the new garment being used to patch the old (v. 36) and the parable of the new wine put into old bottles (vv. 37-39). The point of both relates to something new being applied to something old with disastrous results.

First, there is the parable of the patch (v. 36). Jesus said, "No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent [skizo, to split, to tear, to divide], and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not [ou symphoneo] with the old." If anyone has ever tried to patch an old article of clothing with a new patch knows this to be true. Jesus seems to be saying that such patch both ruins the new garments (from which the new swatch was taken to use as patch) and the old garment but making it an unsightly patch work.

Second, there is the parable of the new wine and the old bottles (vv. 37-39). Again, we have another earthy, everyday, mundane example that all Jesus' hearers would have understood. He begins, "And no man putteth new wine into old bottles (askos, wine skins); else the new wine will burst [rhesso, to tear to pieces like the attack of an animal upon his prey] the bottles, and be spilled (ekcheo, poured out), and the bottles shall perish" (v. 37). In v. 38 Jesus adds positively that new wine must be place in new bottles in order to preserve both.

And he closes in v. 39, saying, "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith the old is better."

Now, what does this parable mean? We might think it would have been nice if Jesus had given the authoritative interpretation as in the parable of the sower.

The standard interpretation is that the new thing (patch, wine) refers to Jesus' teaching and to his disciples who were joined to the old practices of the religious Jews of their day with the result that there was schism and conflict. The new wine of Jesus' teaching and way of life would require a new wineskin of the church, apart from the synagogue. This would include the end of the civil and ceremonial aspects the law, the end of the dietary rules, the end of the sacrificial system, the transformation of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week, etc. The final quote then in v. 39 is meant to be taken ironically, indicating the hard heartedness of those who reject the new teachings of Jesus.

Another possibility, however, would be to turn things on its head and say that Jesus was in fact saying that it was the scribes and Pharisees who had introduced something new; whereas, it was Jesus who was the guardian of something that was ancient and proved. Let's take fasting as an example. Though there were many times and occasions when Israel fasted in mourning or grieving over her sin, the OT only prescribed fasting once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29 speak of "afflicting yours souls" which is taken to be a reference to fasting). The tradition which had developed among the Pharisees of twice weekly fasting was a novelty that, in fact, went beyond what was written in Scripture. One might say that it was Jesus himself and his disciples who were upholding the old practices and the Pharisees who were offering something new that resulted in division and destruction. In that case, when Jesus says, "The old is better" in v. 39 he does not do so ironically but in a straightforward manner. It is Jesus not the Pharisees who is preserving the old paths.

II. Application:

Return to our three initial questions:

1. Why did Jesus when here on earth openly associate with notorious sinners?

Some like to seize on passages like this to make argument for Christian ethics like identify with the poor. Or they suggest that evangelists to go into bars. That misses the wider spiritual point. Jesus identified with sinners, not because he joined them in their sin or even in the context of their sin, but because these are the types of men he came to save. He came to call sinners to repentance.

2. Should Christians today regularly engage in fasting?

One of the keys to interpretation here is how we take Jesus' words in v. 35. Was Jesus referring to fasting of his disciples in grief at the time of his arrest and crucifixion or was he referring to fasting as a regular obligation of Christians after the ascension. I have found some of the Reformed interpreters making the special point that we should avoid the errors of Roman Catholics who stress man-made efforts at fasting as a way to pursue holiness.

Geldenhuis on v. 35; "the Lord here refers to the time from His arrest until His resurrection—then the disciples will of their own accord and without compulsion fast as a result of the grief of their hearts." He adds, "So we may not interpret the Lord's words (as the Roman Catholic Church does) as a command for Christians to fast regularly" (p. 196).

Jesus indeed taught in the sermon on the mount that believers were to fast as a spiritual discipline but to do so in such a way that other men would not know of it (see Matt 6:16–18). We are not to go beyond Scripture in requiring fasts (abstaining from meat on Fridays or giving something up for Lent).

The fact is that the risen Lord, our bridegroom, is with us, even now. Geldenhuis: "every believer is called upon to be joyful in Him and not to fast in sorrow. A joyful, healthy spiritual discipline indeed always remains the characteristic of a follower of Christ" (p. 196).

3. When Jesus came to earth did he come to introduce a new religion that was radically different from the ways that God had previously revealed himself to Israel or did he come to revive the old religion that had become corrupted through adding the traditions of men?

We live in an age where everything new is valued. Everything is new and improved. But from the Biblical perspective the old is better. In some sense I think it is right to say that Jesus did not bring a new religion. No, he brought the fulfillment of a faith that was an old religion. The God who sought out sinful, puny, faithless Israel and made her his covenant bride is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ who comes as a physician to those who know they are sick and in need of a Savior. He comes as a bridegroom ready to take a people to himself. The Jesus who preaches in Galilee will be willing to lay down his life for his friends in Jerusalem, so that he might take it up again and give that life to them.

This is not a new plan. It was there back in Isaiah 53 in the suffering servant. Indeed, we might agree, the old is better.

Message Two: Jesus and the Sinful Woman

“Extravagant Love for Christ”

Luke 7:36–50

In our passage today we are going to see two very different responses to Jesus, the friend of sinners.

On one hand, we are going to see a response toward Jesus that is critical, skeptical, fault finding (Simon the Pharisee).

On the other hand, and in great contrast, we are going to see a response to Jesus that is extravagant, humble, loving (a sinful woman who anoints the feet of Christ).

In some ways the scene that Luke describes, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is a demonstration of illustration in real life of the parable that Jesus has just told in vv. 31–35. Simon the Pharisee is like the fickle children in the marketplace. The sinful woman, on the other hand, shows herself to be one of wisdom’s children (see v. 35).

I. Exposition:

Before we begin our exposition, I want to address one teaching point. The question is how this passage related to accounts we read in the other gospels of a woman anointing Jesus (cf. Matthew 26:7–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–11). Is this the same event?

Two arguments in favor of it being the same:

1. All describe a woman anointing Jesus with costly ointment.
2. Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3 say this anointing took place in the home of a man named Simon.

In response, however, we might say that Jesus was often invited into people’s homes and it is very possible that he might have been anointed by grateful disciples on such occasions more than once.

As for the mention of Simon, we should know that Simon was a very common name among first century Jews. In the NT there are about a

dozen people with the name Simon and the Jewish historian Josephus mentions over 20 persons with the name in his writings. What is more, Matthew and Mark refer to their Simon as “Simon the leper” and not, as in Luke, “Simon the Pharisee.”

There are at least four solid reasons to say that the anointing Luke describes is not the same as that in the other Gospels:

1. The anointings take place in different places. In Luke, the setting is Galilee. In the others it is in Bethany in Judea.
2. The anointing take place at different times. In Luke, the setting is early in Jesus’ public ministry. In the others, it is near the end of his public ministry and just before he goes to the cross.
3. The anointing is done by a different person. In Luke she is a woman who is known as a sinner (7:37). But the woman in John 12:3 as Mary the sister of Lazarus, who is otherwise known not as a notorious sinner but a godly woman of good report.
4. The purpose of the two anointing is different. As we will see the anointing in Luke is a demonstration of God’s saving grace. In the other anointing Judas duplicitously complains of the waste and how the costly ointment might have been given to the poor. Jesus says the poor will always be with us but praises the woman for preparing his body for burial.

The best conclusion is that the anointing Luke records here is a unique event in the life of Jesus that only he records.

With that addressed, we turn now to our passage itself, and we see it unfold in three scenes:

1. Luke describes a demonstration of extravagant love and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 36–38).
2. Jesus tells a parable about a creditor who had two debtors (vv. 39–43).
3. Jesus rebukes one person and blesses another (vv. 44–50).

First, the demonstration of extravagant love (vv. 36–38):

This provides the setting or occasion for all that follows.

Luke begins, “And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him....” (v. 36). The mention of a Pharisee inviting Jesus into his home should throw up red flags. We have already seen the Pharisees attacking and criticizing Jesus. Compare:

Luke 5:21 when Jesus healed and forgave the sins of the paralytic, it was the Pharisees and scribes who sneered, “Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”

Luke 5:30 when Jesus and his disciples sat down to a great feast with Levi and a great company of publicans, the scribes and Pharisees murmured, “Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?”

Luke 5:33 when they criticize the disciples of Jesus for not fasting as do the disciples of John and the Pharisees.

Luke 6:2 when certain Pharisees criticize the disciples of Jesus for doing “what is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?”

Luke 6:7 when the Pharisees watch to see if Jesus will heal the man with the withered hand on the sabbath day “that they might find an accusation against him.”

This smells like a trap. And yet Jesus is willing to enter into the house of this Pharisee. Do you see the grace in that? Jesus is even willing to enter into the households of men who have heretofore shown only scorn to him. He is as willing to break bread with Pharisees as he is with publicans.

While there an unexpected and even scandalous event took place (v. 37). It begins with the entry of a sinful woman. Luke records, “And, behold, a woman in that city which was a sinner....” The commentators are agreed that when Luke calls this nameless woman a “sinner” of that city, he is identifying her as one who was a known harlot. It took no small measure of courage for her to enter the home of this Pharisee as an uninvited guest. Geldenhuys notes that it was “unheard of for such a notorious sinner to enter the house of a

Pharisee. So she probably needed much courage and determination to do it” (p. 236). She carries with her, Luke says, “an alabaster box of ointment.” The “alabaster box” is one word in Greek: alabastron. It might be rendered an alabaster jar or container. The word for “ointment” is myron. It was a costly perfume or oil.

To understand what is described next, you have to understand what would happen at a dinner party in the first century. The guest would take off their shoes and recline on a couch around low tables where food was served. In v. 38 Luke then describes how this woman came and stood behind Jesus weeping. And she did four things:

- (1) She “began to wash his feet with her tears.” Can you imagine someone weeping so violently and so profusely that enough tears were produced to wash the feet of another?
- (2) She “did wipe them with the hairs of her head.” Godet: “In order to duly appreciate this act, we must remember that among the Jews it was one of the greatest humiliations for a woman to be seen in public with her hair down” (p. 228).
- (3) “And did kiss his feet.” Here is another physical act of humiliation, as she kissed the dusty feet of our Lord.
- (4) She “anointed them with the ointment.” Though Luke does not use the verb chrio (cf. Luke 4:18) but the verb aleipho, there is a definite reminder here that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one.

It might be hard for us to fathom from our modern vantage point what an utterly shocking and scandalous thing that this woman had done. There is obviously here a back story to this woman’s dealings with Jesus. There is an unrecorded narrative of her previous interactions with Jesus. Somehow, somewhere, some way she had been in the presence of Jesus and had become a recipient of the unmerited grace of God through Christ. Godet: “The power of a gratitude that knew no bounds for a priceless benefit which she had received from the Savior can alone explain her conduct” (p. 228).

The second scene focuses on Jesus telling a parable of a creditor who had two debtors (vv. 39–43):

The parable is evoked by the response of the dinner's host. In v. 39 Luke says that when he saw what was taking place, "he spake with himself." Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is revealing to us the secret thoughts of this man's heart. This is a reminder that nothing that crosses our minds is beyond the notice of an all-knowing God. His response is not one of thankfulness and gratitude to God that this sinful woman is apparently both grieving over her sin and with joy expressing her thanks to Jesus for the mediation of a changed life. He does not share with the angels before God with joy over even one sinner who repents (cf. Luke 15:7, 10).

Instead he sees an opportunity to criticize Jesus, saying, "This man if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner" (v. 39). There is great irony in this. First, Jesus is in fact the great Prophet, Priest, and King. This man is right that Jesus is not a mere prophet. But he completely misunderstands why Jesus is not a mere prophet. Second he wrongly believes that by coming into contact with this woman Jesus might be defiled, made unclean. What he does not see is just the opposite has taken place. By coming into contact with Jesus this woman has not contaminated him, but he has purified her. Jesus is greater than this woman's sin. Jesus is greater than the greatest sins of the greatest sinners!

In v. 40 Luke says that Jesus answered to the Pharisee. For the first time, he calls him by his name, Simon. This tells us that Jesus knew the secret thoughts of this man's hearts. What is the implied affirmation? Jesus has the full prerogatives of God himself, including divine omniscience. Jesus is God. The Pharisee responds, "Master [didaskalos, or teacher], say on." This sign of respect is hardly genuine.

Jesus then proceeds to tell the parable (v. 41). He says there was a creditor who had two debtors. The KJV says, "the one owed five hundred pence, the other fifty." The Greek word rendered "pence" is denarius, which was the amount of money typically paid for one day's

labor. So one man owed 500 days' labor and the other 50. We might then say that one owed for roughly two years' wages and the other for only two months. According to the last census the median household income in Albemarle County where I live was nearly \$66,000. So, let's say the one owed some \$130,000 and the other \$11,000.

Jesus continues, "And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Now, notice that though one owed much more than the other, neither had the ability or resources to repay the debt. In this sense both were in the same predicament and deserving of the same just punishment. But the creditor resolved to forgive both debts. I love the brevity, the starkness of that description.

One need not be a genius to figure out the correspondents in this parable. Who is the creditor? It is the holy God of Scripture. Who are the debtors? Sinners who have to one degree or another sinned against this holy God and who are subject to his just judgment. And what does he do? He acts unilaterally, sovereignly, finally, incontrovertibly, inexplicably, and forgives both. Why? Because he can. Note there is no mention of their pleading with him, seeking him, imploring him. He just does it. He acts. He forgives.

Jesus then asks Simon, "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" (v. 42b). You should always be worried if Jesus tells a parable and then asks you a question about it (cf. his question to the lawyer at the close of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:36).

Simon sheepishly answers in v. 43: "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most." Perhaps this man thought he was luring Jesus into a trap but now the hunter has become the hunted. Jesus is exposing this man's heart. Jesus says to him, "Thou hast rightly judged."

If things are not perfectly clear, Jesus makes them so in the third and final scene as he rebukes one person and blesses another (vv. 44–50):

I like the way this starts in v. 44. Jesus turns to the woman but speaks to what must have been a quite uncomfortable Simon. He says to him, "Seest thou this woman?" And then Jesus lays out the great

contrast between the way Simon received him and the way this woman received him (vv. 44–46).

You gave no water for my feet, she bathed them with tears and wiped them with her hair (v. 44).

You did not give me the kiss of greeting on the cheek, but she has showered by very feet with kisses (v. 45).

You did not anoint my head with oil (cheap olive oil), but she anointed my feet with costly ointment (v. 46).

Jesus concludes his address to Simon in v. 47: “Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins which are many are forgiven; for she loved much....”

We need to pause here to make sure that we do not fall into a misunderstanding. One could misinterpret Jesus’ words here, in particular, when he says that the sinful woman’s sins were forgiven “for she loved much.” One could falsely read into this statement the sense that her sins were forgiven BECAUSE she loved much. This would mean that it has been the effort or the work of her love which had caused or obligated Christ to forgive her. This is the way Roman Catholics and other Arminians are prone to interpret this statement. The correct understanding, however, it to see the conjunction *hoti* as introducing a statement of result. Her sins had been forgiven and the overwhelming result was that she loved much in response. One of the old commentators put it this way: “We must not forget” that the word “for” here does not express “the relation of the effect to its cause” but “the relation ... of the proof to the thing proved. We may say, It is light, for the sun is risen; but we may also say, The sun is risen, for ... it is light” (Godet, p. 230).

What about the second half of v. 47? “but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” Does this mean that some folk only need a little forgiveness and other much? No, remember in the parable that both debtors were in the same fix regardless of the relative degree of their debt. The point here is that there are some people, like this Pharisee, who considered themselves to be lesser sinners than others. They considered that they were less in need of God’s forgiveness than others. And their high view of their spiritual state, reflected in the low

view of their sin, meant that they expressed little outward love for God, which meant they had little outward love for Christ. He is confronting and rebuking Simon for his loveless spirit toward himself.

This is followed, finally, by an expression of blessing. Jesus said to the woman: “Thy sins are forgiven.” This is the second time in Luke where we have read of Jesus declaring the forgiveness of sins (cf. his words to the paralytic in Luke 5:20). Again, what we are seeing is Jesus taking to himself the prerogatives of God. Yes, the question that is asked by the others who sit at the meal is spot on: “Who is this that forgiveth sins also?” (v. 49). Who can forgive sins but God himself? The conclusion: Jesus is LORD! Was this the moment of this woman’s salvation? No, that does not seem the case. She came into Simon’s house already as a grateful believer. I think what we see here is a moment of Jesus giving assurance of salvation. He gives second touches. He is reiterating to this woman that she is, in fact, the recipient of divine forgiveness. He saves us and, at times, he is so kind to tell us again and remind us again. You are forgiven. You are forgiven.

The last word is that of Jesus to the woman (v. 50).

First, he says, “Thy faith has saved thee.” Again, this is an expression that might be misunderstood as saying that the salvation of this woman was the result of her work (her act of faith as a work). In comparison to v. 47 we need to first to consider that Jesus did not say “Thy love has saved thee.” Second, we have to read this in light of the whole counsel of God. What Jesus says is in complete harmony with what Paul taught. Her faith sprang from God’s gracious work of regeneration. Ephesians 2:8–9: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” This is the faith that had saved her.

Finally, he says, “Go in peace.” I often use that as a parting word to my congregation in our Lord’s Day worship. Behind that word “peace” is the Hebrew word shalom. Go in the wholeness, the fullness, the maturity, the health of Almighty God.

What Jesus, in effect says in these parting words of blessing are: You are saved, now be sanctified.

II. Application:

The application here is quite simple. The question is, “Are you more like the sinful woman or more like Simon the Pharisee?”

Do you perceive that you have been forgiven much or little?

And what is the quality of the love you have expressed toward Christ? Do you love little because you perceive that God has only been obligated to forgive little?

Or do you rightly see yourself the way this woman saw herself? Have you ever expressed your love for Christ in extravagant ways? Have you poured out tears of repentance? Have you been undone in humiliation before him? Have you poured out the most costly things at his feet? Have you known his forgiveness and has he ever repeated that word to you? Has he reminded you that you have been saved by faith alone? Has he called you to walk in peace, in living a wholly sanctified life before him?

Message Three: Jesus and the Gadarene Demoniac

“Great things God hath done”

Luke 8:26–40

Our passage today provides an account of Jesus healing through exorcism. It is sometimes called the healing of the Gadarene demoniac. It comes on the heels of the account of Jesus’ miraculous stilling of the storm. Godet: “This portion brings us before a storm no less difficult to still, and yet more striking victory” (p. 243).

This raises the question of which is the greater miracle, which the greater demonstration of the authority and power of Jesus—that he can rebuke “the wind and the raging of the water” (v. 24), or that he can rebuke demons that infest a beleaguered soul? That he can bring calm to a body of water or that he can bring calm to the body and spirit of a man?

By the end, I think we will see that the point of this parable is to make clear who Jesus and how he can act with such authority and power.

I. Exposition:

We begin in v. 26 with the note that Jesus and his disciples arrived “in the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee.” There is some discussion among scholars as to the exact cite of this region. There are also variations in the different manuscripts of the NT, so that sometimes the place is translated “the country of the Gerasenes” (so NASB).

This arrival is the conclusion of a journey narrative begun in v. 22. Perhaps Jesus had left the place where he was ministering in order to escape “the press” of the crowds who vied for his attention. On the ship he had fallen asleep, perhaps from physical exhaustion (v. 23).

As we shall see, the place where he arrives is apparently an area with a greater Gentile presence and influence.

In v. 27 we read that no sooner had our Lord disembarked than he is met by a man in great need whose healing is the focus of the narrative.

We are told three things about this man and his condition:

First, he “had devils long time.” This tells us that the man’s problem was of a spiritual nature. He was a demoniac, one possessed of evil spirits. And he had suffered with this malady for a long time. His problem was not of recent origin. Back when we preached through Luke 4, we read there of Jesus casting an unclean spirit out of a man (see 4:33–37), and we reflected at that time on the nature of this particular malady. I noted then that I believe demon possession was an extra-ordinary occurrence (that is, one not ordinarily encountered today) which God allowed particularly at the time of Christ’s ministry, primarily to provide a means for demonstrating the power of authority of Jesus in healing those like this man. One commentator notes that such possessions were something like anti-incarnations: “The Evil One, as it were, wanted to become man” (Geldenhuys, p. 256).

Second, the man “ware no clothes.” Not only does this indicate a lack of care for the body to protect it from the elements, but it also shows a lack of modesty and a lack of shame.

Third, he “neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.” From the Jewish perspective, this meant he dwelt in a place that would have exposed him to contamination and ritual uncleanness. Spiritually it reflects moroseness, morbidity, a preoccupation with unwholesome thoughts and feelings, and a sick fascination with death.

In v. 28 we see the response of this spiritually diseased man to Jesus. When he sees Jesus he cries out and falls down before him. In a loud voice he asks, “What have I to do with thee [lit: what to me and to you], Jesus, thou Son of God most high?” One question we might ask is, “Who is speaking?” Is it the man or is it the demons who infest him, using him like a puppet? It is striking that they know who Jesus is. He is called by name. Did his fame precede him or is was this a supernatural insight of the demons? Note also that they recognize who Jesus is in nature. They call him, “thou Son of God most high.”

This is a reminder of the distinction between intellectual knowledge (or assent) as to who Jesus is and saving knowledge. This man knows who Jesus is, but he does not, as yet, know who Jesus is. Finally, the man (or the demons within him) beg: “I beseech thee, torment me not.” Those who had shown no mercy to this poor beleaguered man, beg for mercy for themselves.

In v. 29 we realize that Luke’s narrative is not unfolding in a necessarily orderly manner. We learn the man said this because Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out. And we learn four more things about this man’s sufferings:

First, “For oftentimes it had caught him.” The verb here is *synarpazo*, meaning to seize, to grab, to drag. It is sometimes used as a nautical term to describe how a vicious wind can catch or drag a vessel off course.

Second, “and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters” He was bound hand and foot. This addresses what had been done humanly speaking to attempt to control him. He had been physically restrained. Today such a one would also have been given the chains of psychotherapeutic drugs.

Third, “and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil [daimonos] into the wilderness.” The human efforts to control and constrain this man had been futile. He had been sent into isolation in the wilderness.

In v. 30 Jesus asks, “What is thy name?” One wonders if he meant the man or the devils. Or was Jesus even by that question driving a healing wedge between the two? Godet says of this question:

For what purpose? There is nothing so suitable as a calm and simple question to bring a madman to himself. Above all, there is no more natural way of awakening a man who is beside himself the consciousness of his own personality, than to make him tell his own name. A man’s name becomes the expression of his character, and a summary of the history of his life (p. 245).

The man responds: “Legion.” And Luke explains: “because many devils were entered into him.”

The military historians tell us that a Roman legion contained c. 6,000 men. We do not know if there were precisely that many demons in this fellow, but the point is that there was a vast host. And as the Roman legions had conquered, subjugated, and destroyed every nation in their path, so this demonic force had done to this man. He was their vassal!

These demons, however, see the handwriting on the wall as they stand before Jesus. So, in v. 31 they beseech Jesus that he would not send them out into “the deep” [abyssos]. We do not know precisely what is meant here, but some have speculated that this refers to an unseen abode of such spiritual beings.

What is more in v. 32 they ask Jesus if they might be permitted to enter into “an herd of swine feeding on the mountain.” Mark adds the detail that there were c. 2,000 pigs in that herd (Mark 5:13). The fact that there were swine nearby again tells us that Jesus is exercising his ministry either in Gentile territory or an area heavily influenced by Gentile culture, since pigs were an unclean animals for Torah-observant Jews. The final line in v. 32 is “And he suffered them.” This is a reminder of the sovereignty of the Lord over all things, even demons. Luther: “Even the devil is God’s devil.” Nothing happens without the Lord’s permission.

What happens next is a scene of violent chaos, certainly something the demons had not anticipated. When these devils enter the swine, these brute animals are brought into such a panic that the herd “ran violently” [ormao, to rush wildly] and Luke says they “were choked” or drowned. Have you ever seen movies where they say, “No animals were harmed in the making of this film.” Well, in this case, animals were harmed.

Can you believe some skeptics have challenged the ethics of this account, asking how Jesus could have permitted the property of others to be destroyed. Geldenhuys responds:

There should, however, be no question, for it was not Jesus that caused the swine to drown, but the evil spirits.

He adds, as to Jesus' permission:

Whatever the reason was why the Saviour allowed the evil spirits to enter into the swine, with the results that the animals were all drowned, we know that He acted in perfect wisdom and righteousness, and that He had the divine right to act as He did (p. 256).

Now can you imagine the response of the keepers of the swine? In v. 34 we read that they fled and told what had happened "in the city and in the country."

In v. 35 it says that those who heard of this then came to Jesus and they found the man who had been miraculously exorcised. The storm has been calmed. One commentator (Geldenhuys, p. 259) notes a fivefold change that has taken place in the man:

- (1) He has been freed from the evil spirits;
- (2) He is not longer restless, but is sitting at the feet of Jesus (this posture shows that he has become a disciple);
- (3) He is not longer naked, but clothed;
- (4) He is in his senses again (sophroneo, to be in one's right mind, to think sensibly and seriously).
- (5) He is sociable again, sitting at the feet of Jesus instead of avoiding or molesting people.

Notice at the end of v. 35 the response: "and they were afraid [phobeo]." This can be negative (fear, terror) or positive (awe, reverence).

What is more, those who had witnessed the exorcism (probably including the disciples of Jesus) "told them by what means [the Greek particle: pos] he that was possessed of the devils was healed" (v. 36). The verb for "healed" is sozo. It can mean "to heal" (physically) but it can also mean "to save." Indeed, there is a double meaning here. He

has been physically healed but he has also been saved. This is a conversion story. He is saved like the OT saints, looking forward to the cross and resurrection.

Surely, this miracle will yield a grateful response from the people of the Gadarene country! Surely, they knew the depraved and deplorable state of this man before meeting Christ and will praise God for his deliverance! What is more, surely they will want Jesus to stay so that he might heal many others in their midst! But no! This is not their response. Some have suggested, that “they attached far more value to their earthly possessions than to the salvation of the possessed man and their own salvation as well” (Geldenhuys, p. 256).

So, in v. 37 we read that they “besought him to depart from them” adding again, “for they were taken with great fear” (cf. v. 35). And so Jesus went back into his ship to depart. He does not stay where he is not welcomed.

What about the man whose life has just been transformed? Will he become one of the disciples of Jesus who will follow after him? Will he be like Peter, James, and John who “forsook all, and followed him” (5:11)? Will he be like Mary Magdalene “out of whom went seven devils” (v. 2) and the others who accompanied Jesus and “ministered unto him of their substance” (v. 3)?

In v. 38 we read that the man “besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away....” This is the charge or commission that Jesus gave to this man: “Return to thine own house, and show [diegomai, the same verb is used in Luke 1:1 in reference to “setting forth declaration”] how great things God hath done unto thee” (v. 39a).

It is a mark of the genuineness of this man’s faith in Jesus that in v. 39 b we read of this man’s obedience: “And he went his way, and published [kerusso, to preach or proclaim] throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.” This man was ordained as a preacher of the gospel by the Lord Jesus Christ himself and was sent to herald the good news not in some exotic locale, but in his own city. What a testimony this must have been!

II. Applications:

Notice four points of spiritual application:

1. **The extra-ordinary exorcism of this man provides something of a parable for what happens in ordinary conversion.**

Now, I have previously noted in this series that I think the wrong application of exorcism account like this is to jump to the conclusion that we should presume to do exorcisms. These were extraordinary miracles of our Lord. But there is in this account something of the story of every man who has struggled (if not with demons) with indwelling sin. Indwelling sin does some of the same soul destroying things that these demons did (cf. vv. 27, 29).

It wants to hold us for a long time. It wants to strip up bare of modesty and propriety. Sin wants to know no shame for sin. It wants to drive us to the tombs, to love death and to be fascinated by it. It oftentimes catches us (grabs us, seizes us, and blows us off course). It throws off all human means we attempt to use to constrain it. And it drives us into the wilderness of despair and loneliness and isolation.

Then, we meet the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God the most high. And we come to know who he is not merely intellectually but savingly. And he begins the process of expelling sin and invading our lives with his Spirit.

There is at least a five-fold change in us:

- (1) We are freed from our bondage to sin for we serve a new master;
- (2) We are no longer restless and discontent but we sit at the feet of Jesus;
- (3) We are no longer naked, but we are clothed in Christ's righteousness;
- (4) We come to our senses. Perhaps for the first time in our lives we begin to think rightly. Or, we simply begin to think. Isn't it

interesting that this man's transformation and release from sin was not marked by his going into some wild ecstatic frenzy or having some esoteric spiritual experience. It is marked by his becoming orderly and reasonable and rational in his thinking.

(5) He is sociable. He joins the society of the saints.

This is how people are healed (saved) by Jesus.

2. Despite the obvious working of God in their midst, sometimes men will still reject him and ask him to depart from them (v. 37).

When we see this happening, we should not lose heart. For this happened in the very earthly ministry of our Lord. Notice also the warning in this: Jesus will not stay where he is not welcomed.

3. Sometimes Jesus calls men to stay and minister in the place where they live rather than to leave and go someplace else.

We make much (and rightly so) of the missionary call to go to other cultures with the gospel, but sometimes the Lord's call is like that to this man (v. 39b).

4. Notice the declaration that is made in v. 39 as to the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last year I read an introduction to the NT written by the agnostic (anti-Christian) scholar Bart Ehrman. In that book, he says that it is only in the Gospel of John that Jesus is identified as being equal with God (see p. 112). According to his view, the first three Gospels never make such a high claim for Jesus. You wonder sometimes if he has read the same book!

Look at v. 39. What does Jesus tell the man to do:

“Return to thine own house, and shew **how great things God hath done unto thee.**”

And what does Luke record that the man did?

“And he went his way and published throughout the whole city **how great things Jesus had done unto him.**”

What declaration is Luke making? Jesus is Lord. Jesus is God. The work of God is the work of Jesus. The work of Jesus is the work of God.

Message Four: Jesus' Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican

“God be merciful to me a sinner”

Luke 18:9–17

In this passage we examine not a narrative describing Jesus encountering a sinner, but we hear a parable that Jesus told about a justified sinner.

In Luke 18:1–8, Jesus told his disciples the parable of the unjust judge in order to teach them “that men ought always to pray and not to lose heart” (v. 1). Today we listen as Jesus continues his teaching on prayer by offering a second parable, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (tax collector).

If the first parable taught us about the God to whom we pray (i.e., he is not a miserly and difficult God, lacking in compassion) and about persistence and even constancy in prayer without growing faint, the second parable will teach us more about improper and proper dispositions and attitudes in prayer.

Consider: With what attitude and in what frame of mind do you approach God in prayer? Do you approach God with pride, lauding inwardly how religious you are? How spiritual? How faithful? Or do you come to God with humility and lowliness? Do you come thinking little of yourself and much of God? Do you come like a sick and dying man to the Great Physician who give life? Do you come to Christ like a little child, looking to him for protection and care for your every need?

I. Exposition:

The Pharisee and the Publican (vv. 9–14):

This second parable is introduced in v. 9 and Luke tells us that it had a different audience or object. This parable was told to those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” This probably means there were some folk like that, probably

Pharisees and scribes and other religious leaders who were scoffing at Jesus' teaching.

Notice the two aspects of the character and actions of the types of men toward whom Jesus aimed this parable:

First, they trusted (peitho: to be persuaded, convinced, satisfied) in themselves that they were righteous. We would call this being self-righteous. It is thinking highly of oneself and one's spiritual state. It is demonstrated in the likes of people who do good deeds and then tweet about those deeds, or post them on Facebook or on a blog, so everyone can see their good deeds. It is an abiding temptation and a besetting sin or "bosom sin" of religious people, like Pharisee and like many conservative Christians in our day. The point: We should not think this parable is told for other people, but we should think it is told for us.

Second, they were looking down upon others. Jesus says, "They despised others (the verb here exoutheneo: to treat with contempt, to look down upon, to count as nothing). The mark of self-righteousness is the tendency to develop a disdain for those that one feels has not met your superior level of spirituality.

One of the things we learn about Jesus as we read the Gospels is that our Lord cannot abide a proud man in his presence. Have you ever been to the beach as the tide comes in, and you see sand castles or mounds that have been built that are going to be destroyed and you have an urge to kick them over? Jesus is both like the man who has the urge to kick the high mounds over and like the tide that will know them over, when it comes to the proud.

Two key characters introduced in v. 10. They are a Pharisee and a publican (tax collector), and they both go up to the temple in Jerusalem to pray. So, again, this will be another parable centered around prayer, and its focus will be on the spiritual disposition of these men.

First, Jesus describes the Pharisee in v. 11. Notice he stands to pray. This is likely not one of the marks of his pride, for it was apparently customary among the Jews of Jesus' day to pray while standing. The

standing is not the offense, but it is what he said “with himself.” This little phrase is an indicator of trouble. His communication is not with God (though he names the name of God) but with himself. Thus, it is man-centered. One type of false prayer is that we might pray merely to be heard by others. This makes prayer a sermon. But a second type of false prayer is one in which prayer is merely an internal conversation in our own minds. It is never really directed to the one true God and, in effect, it is a prayer directly to our own god, namely to our own selves. Thus, much idolatry is conducted in the name of prayer.

Jesus reports that the man self-righteously prayed, “God, I thank thee (eucharisto), that I am not as other men are, extortioners (harpages: one who is grasping of greedy, a swindler), unjust (adikoi: evil, sinful, dishonest), adulterers (mochoi: those who have broken the seventh commandment)....” This man clearly assumes the worst about everyone else and the best about himself. He is a “human relativizer” in that he revels in comparing himself to the worst of men, making them his standard for righteousness, rather than making the holiness and perfection of God his standard. The height of his self-righteous hypocrisy comes at the close as he says inwardly, “or even as this publican.”

The religiously elite Jews of Jesus’ day would have looked down on tax collectors as spiritually impure due to their association with Gentiles and with ungodly mammon. But Jesus appealed to many of these men just as John the Baptist had before him. Compare:

KJV Luke 3:12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

One of Jesus’ twelve disciples had been Levi (Matthew) the tax collector (cf. Luke 5:27 where Jesus sees Levi sitting at “the receipt of custom” and saying to him “Follow me”). When Jesus went into Levi’s house to share a meal with him and his fellow tax collectors, the religious leaders complained to Jesus’ followers:

KJV Luke 5:30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

Indeed, Jesus was a friend of sinners, so we should not be too surprised when he tells a parable in which an outwardly religious man comes off badly and an outwardly questionable man comes off as sincere.

If in the first part of the prayer he glories in what he is not, in the second he glories in the good that he thinks he has done. And in his mind, his good has been an abounding and overflowing good (see v. 12). He has fasted twice weekly, even though most Jews of Jesus day held that the OT taught only fasting on the Day of Atonement. We know from other Jewish and even Christian writings that some pious Jews in Jesus' day fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. What is more he tithed of all he had (verb *apodektomai*; literally: to take from the tenth), though, again, most in Jesus day taught that a tithe was required only of certain crops under certain conditions (see Deut 4:22 ff.). He not only followed the rules he went above and beyond the rules. Maybe rather than just three times a day he even prayed five times a day! Do you see how legalism always leads to self-righteous pride? If I can outline the required behavior and if I can keep those external standards then I can be proud that I—all by myself—kept them. We have seen Jesus offer this kind of criticism as the false and perverted piety of the Pharisees previously in Luke:

KJV Luke 11:42 But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Well did the prophet Jeremiah say:

KJV Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

In nearly complete contrast is the publican (v. 13). He is also standing but he stands “afar off.” His distance from the center of the temple reflects the spiritual distance he feels from God due to his sinfulness. And the temple was very much designed to give a physical representation of sanctification. It all centered around “the holy of

holies.” If you were not holy, you had best not come close, lest you suffer the same fate of others who have acted presumptuously and suffered the consequences (Nadab and Abihu in Lev. 10; Uzzah who committed the “error” of reaching out to steady the ark in 2 Sam 6:6–7). Whereas the Pharisee boldly mouthed God’s name, though he was really speaking to himself, this second man, Jesus says, “would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven.” And instead, he smote or struck (typto: to strike to beat; it can even mean to wound, as the root verb indicates, to leave a “type” or mark) upon his breast (Greek: stethos: chest; root for the word “stethoscope”). Notice, as well, that the verb here is in the imperfect tense. It refers to repeated action in the past. He did not just strike himself once but multiple times.

And then, if this stance was not enough, there are his words which match perfectly his posture. His prayer is: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” The verb here for “to be merciful” is hilaskomai. It is not the root word that is typically used in the NT to describe the giving of mercy in the sense of allowing someone to escape some penalty they are rightly due. This root word does not appear in Luke 6:36 where Jesus taught: “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (there the adjective oiktirmon is used). The word used here (hilaskomai) literally means to make propitiation for sins. Compare:

KJV Romans 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [the related noun hilasterion] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

KJV 1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation [the related noun, hilasmos] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

KJV 1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation [hilasmos] for our sins.

There are a couple of things that secular Bible scholars don’t like or understand about this passage. First, they don’t like that Jesus

teaches not only that man needs his sins taken away (expiation), but that he also needs those sins paid for by someone else in order to satisfy the wrath of God (propitiation). Second, they don't like it, because what Jesus teaches sounds so much like what the apostles Paul and John teach. They want to drive a wedge between Jesus and the apostles (particularly Paul). Jesus presents a man who knows he is a sinner and that he needs a propitiatory sacrifice for his sins.

To round it off, Jesus closes: "I tell you this man [the publican] went down to his house justified than the other" (v. 14). Here is the great Pauline word—a Pauline thunderbolt— on the lips of Jesus. Jesus speaks of a man being justified by faith and not by works, the great article of the faith upon which Luther said our religion either stands or falls. Jesus teaches just as Paul did:

KJV Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

KJV Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

All the righteous deeds, the good works, of that Pharisee were nothing but filthy rags in God's sight (Isa 64:6). One man went home lacking justification because he thought much of himself and his own righteousness and little of God, while one went home justified because he thought little of himself and his own righteousness and much of God.

Jesus adds that those who exalt themselves will be abased but those who humble themselves will be exalted (v. 14b). We might well call this the great reversal, the great turnabout.

Now, it is striking that Luke records just after Jesus told this parable, they brought "infants" (the precise word here indeed is not ta tekna "children" but ta brephe which refers to very young children, newborns, nursing infants) that he might touch them. They wanted a blessing from Jesus, even if they did not know him as Messiah, they,

at the least, saw him as a holy man. Indeed, the very touch of Jesus was powerful. Ask the woman who touched the hem of his garment and had her twelve year flow of blood arrested (Luke 9:44). Consider:

KJV Mark 6:56 And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

Luke adds that when the disciples saw this they rebuked those bringing these infants to Jesus (v. 15b). No doubt, they were doing what they thought was right. They were attempting to protect Jesus from always being in demand by the crowds.

Jesus, however, sees an opportunity for teaching. He has told two verbal parables, and now he is going to tell a visual parable. Jesus calls out and says, “Suffer [aphiemi: let or allow] little children [here ta paidia] to come unto me and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.”

Now, sometimes our paedobaptist friends will seize on this passage as some kind of justification for infant baptism. That is a gross mishearing of this text. This is made clear in v. 17 where Jesus makes plain that he is using these children as an illustration (read v. 17). You can only enter the kingdom if you come like a little child (here paidion).

II. Applications:

1. We are to approach the throne of grace with a humble disposition.

We are given a model here of what we are to avoid: The self-trusting, self-justifying disposition of the Pharisee, which is accompanied by a looking down upon others.

And we are given a model of what we are to follow: The publican, who comes to the Lord empty handed. “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.”

The only man who can truly pray is a saved man. And the only way a man can be saved is if he understands his sin and his desperate and profound need of a Savior. He must come with a publican-like spirit

and not with a Pharisee-like spirit. This is the mark of a man who has been justified by faith.

I ran across one commentator who made a good point I think on this passage and that is we should beware of so denigrating the Pharisee and admiring the publican that we think any effort to seek holiness are necessarily self-righteous and sinful. In fact, in our day it may be a more likely scenario to see proud publican standing to pray while looking down on the religious.

Here's the comment:

It is one of the marks of our time that the Pharisee and the publican have changed places; and it is the modern equivalent of the publican who may be heard thanking God that he is not like those canting, humbug, hypocrites, and kill-joys, whose chief offense is that they take their religion seriously. This publican was a rotter and he knew it. He asked for God's mercy, because it was the only thing he could ask for (T. W. Manson as quoted in Geldenhuys, p. 452).

2. We must come into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ as children.

In the context of Luke's narrative, much of this teaching had started with some of the Pharisees asking Jesus when the kingdom of God would come (17:20), and Jesus had answered that it would not come with observation for "the kingdom of God is within you" (v. 21).

Here in our passage today Jesus is coming back to that. You enter the kingdom when you have a child-like faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. I am struck by the fact that this trust is not like that of a young child who must believe what his parents teach him about the world. But it is the trust and dependence of a nursing infant. Is there any image more helpless? He must be held. He cannot understand the words of his comforter but he knows his voice. He is dependent for everything. To be fed and comforted and kept warm and safe.

The sinner who would be a friend of Jesus must be like that weak widow, like that humble publican, like that totally dependent infant.

God be merciful to me a sinner.

Message Five: Jesus and Zachaeus

“Seeking and Saving the Lost”

Luke 19:1–10

Most American evangelicals know this passage from the children’s song, which begins, “Zachaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he....”

But this is not a “Junior Church” or “Children’s Church” passage. As with other “familiar” parts of Scripture, it is our task to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. Our passage deals with the serious matter of mature discipleship, or leaving all to follow Christ. And, most importantly, it throws light upon Christ as the Seeker and Savior of sinners.

I. Exposition:

Jesus is drawing closer to Jerusalem and the consummation of his ministry that will take place there (as he predicted in 18:31–33).

As he drew near to Jericho he restored the sight of a blind man (18:35 ff).

Now, in 19:1 we read of another miracle, this one will not physical but spiritual, as he arrives in Jericho (read v. 1). Jericho was situated North of the Dead Sea and just a few miles East of Jerusalem.

Luke records in v. 2: “And behold there was a man named Zachaeus....” It seems that this was the typical way of Jesus’ ministry. And behold there was a man. There are always men who are providentially placed in the path of Jesus. There are men who think they initiated seeking him who come to discover that he finds them. 1 John 4:19: “We love him, because he first loved us.”

Notice two things said of this man:

First, he was “the chief among the publicans [architelones, the “arch” tax collector].” He was not just any publican but a leader among the

publicans, which for many Jews would have translated as a “prince of thieves” or a “captain of sinners.” He was not just a sinner but a notorious sinner.

Second, Luke says, “and he was rich.” This second description would have flowed from or been inseparably related to the first. How did he become rich? Most likely he gained his wealth by sordid means, by extortion and corruption through his position of authority. This is now the second man in two chapters we have met who is described as being rich. The first was the rich ruler (18:18 ff). And what had happened to him? He had refused the summons of Jesus to become his disciple because “he was very rich” (18:22–23). Then Jesus had taught of the difficulty and even the near impossibility of a rich man entering heaven, though he also declared hope, even for the rich, because with God all things are possible (18:27).

From what we have read thus far we might well expect that this is going to be yet another illustration of anti-discipleship, of another man making spiritual shipwreck of faith. But, this time we will find that things will end differently.

Zachaeus proved to be a determined seeker of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at v. 3a: “And he sought to see Jesus who he was....” We could meditate long on that little phrase. We can assume that Zachaeus had gotten word that Jesus would be passing through Jericho, just as the blind beggar had heard of Jesus’ coming. Jesus’ reputation preceded him. But aside from the fact that he was slight of stature, there does not seem to be any outward reason why Zachaeus was anxious to encounter Jesus. He was not disabled like the paralyzed man whose friends brought him to Jesus (Luke 5). He was not blind like the man by the wayside at Jericho (Luke 18). As already noted, he was not a poor man. We see no immediate physical or psychological reason for him to seek out Jesus (though we might speculate as to whether or not he might have had a wounded conscience from his abuse of power). Still, he had a need and an overwhelming desire to see Jesus and to discover who he was. In truth, he had an internal disability. He had a spiritual sickness, a disturbance in his soul caused by sin.

Though he might not have been able to name it or recognize it, it was nonetheless there.

I think of Jesus' question to his disciples, "Whom say the people that I am?" (9:18) and then his question, "But whom say ye that I am?" That is the pivotal question of life. It is the hinge question. But how few ask it? How many go through life, as the cultural critic Neil Postman described it, "amusing themselves to death" but never seeking to know who Christ is? Maybe this is why so many make so much of sports events and other forms of entertainment. It is an effort to give meaning and purpose to life. When Christ is not our chief purpose we must invent lesser purposes to attempt to fill the void.

In the second half of v. 3 we learn that the desire to "see" Jesus was a literal one. He wanted to lay eyes upon Jesus. He had heard about him, and he wanted to see him in the flesh. Perhaps he was motivated by the desire men have to see celebrities or to shake the hand of famous men. But there were two barriers. First, there was a great press or crowd that was flocking to see Jesus. Second he was a man of "little stature [literally: he was mikros in stature]." No doubt his "vertical challenge" was a reflection of his spiritual challenges just as the previous man's blindness was an outward expression of his spiritual state. He did not measure up to God's righteous standards. He was a small man.

But he was an ingenious man and he was a determined man. When God awakens a desire in a man to see Jesus nothing can stop him from reaching his goal. He runs before, getting ahead of the crowd and scales a sycamore tree to see Jesus, having anticipated the route that Jesus would take: "for he was to pass that way" (v. 4b).

Then, in v. 5 we have Jesus encounter with this man. Notice, he goes looking for Jesus, but Jesus finds him: "And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him...." Notice that Jesus knew the man was there. Jesus has a sense to place or find a man that is stronger than any gps tracking device. He knows not only where men are physically, but he knows where they are spiritually. Note well the subtle emphasis of the language. Zachaeus went to see Jesus, but it is Jesus who looks up and sees him.

Jesus then issues to the man an authoritative command: “make haste, and come down; for today I must come to your house” (v. 5b).

Notice the immediacy of Jesus words. He tells him to “make haste, and come down” (literally “hurrying, come down”). And he declares that he will come to his house that “today.” There is not invitation for delay but for immediate obedience.

Notice the authority of Jesus’ words. Jesus does not wait for Zachaeus to offer the invitation. He does not say, “You know if you want, and if it’s not too much trouble, and if you don’t have any other plans, or if you’re not doing anything else that’s important, then maybe possibly I could come to your house today.”

Notice the necessity of Jesus’ words. “for today I must [the impersonal dei] abide at thy house.” The same word dei is used by Jesus in Luke when as a 12 year old he said in the temple “I must be about my Father’s business” (2:49). When as he commences his ministry, he says, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also” (4:43). When he predicts the cross, he says, “the Son of Man must suffer many things” (9:22). And he says the same of his coming in to abide (meno) in his house. Compare:

KJV John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

What is being spoken of here is not merely an invitation to hospitality but a divine appointment for salvation. So, Jesus says today I must abide at thy house. All things appointed by the Father must be fulfilled. For those whom he chooses for salvation, he provides the means of salvation. And nothing can frustrate than plan.

Notice then in v. 6 the response of Zachaeus, and it is a response of obedience. Not just obedience, but it is glad obedience. He received him joyfully. Jesus does not have to bring men kicking and screaming into the kingdom. When their hearts are changed by God then they want the presence of Christ in their lives. They welcome him.

With v. 7 we have the reaction or response of the onlookers. What a contrast it is to the joyful reaction of Zachaeus! “And when they all

saw it, they murmured [diagonguzo: to complain, to grumble]....”
Murmuring was what the Israelites did in the wilderness against Moses. Already we have seen the religious leaders murmuring against Jesus in Luke. Recall Luke 5 when the publican Levi became a disciple and he welcomed Jesus into his home and invited “a great company of publicans” and Jesus sat down with them (v. 29), Luke records:

KJV Luke 5:30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

Also in Luke 15:1–2 we read:

KJV Luke 15:1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

This provides the setting for Jesus telling the parable of lost things (sheep, coin, son). Here indeed is a passage in which Jesus is finding a lost son! He is the great man–fisher!

The ungodly response of the onlookers contrasts sharply with the godly response of Zachaeus. He stands and speaks to the Lord (v. 8a). Note, here is another place where Luke cannot contain his naming of Jesus as Lord. Here is his declaration: “Behold, Lord [another confession that cannot be held back, cf. the blind man in 18:41], the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”

What is being described here is the overflow of the heart of a newly converted man who wants to make amends for his past sins.
Compare:

KJV Titus 2:14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Notice about this:

This is not meant to be held as some kind of rigid formula. With the rich young ruler Jesus demanded he give all he had to the poor. This

man, from the overflow of a saved heart, gives half his possessions. Jesus customizes the good deeds individually that flow from the converted.

Notice that this man's actions again are, in particular, an attempt to make retribution for past sins. He wants to restore fourfold to those whom he had taken by false accusation. In the background here is the OT law:

KJV Exodus 22:1 If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.

KJV Leviticus 6:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour; 3 Or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein: 4 Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, 5 Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering.

The latter of these, in particular, said a man was to restore what was taken with one fifth part or 20% more added. But this man desired to restore fourfold or some 20 times more than the law required. Conversion does not mean that a man no longer cares for the law but that he wants to obey and he wants to obey it in a superabounding manner (cf. the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5: "You have heard it said.... but I say to you....").

These good deeds are not the root of Zachaeus' salvation but the fruit of it.

Jesus declares to him in v. 9: "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." Jesus declares that this man has been surely and soundly converted not because of what

he has done but because of his status as a son of Abraham. This man who had been designated by the religious leaders as not a true Israelite is now declared by Jesus to be a true Israelite, a true son of Abraham.

What is being anticipated here is the fact that a true Israelite, then, is not a son of Abraham by virtue of his ethnicity but by virtue of the fact that he seeks Jesus and recognizes him for who he is, who confessed his Lordship, and receives him gladly into his house, and begins to live a life transformed by Christ. Compare:

KJV Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Compare likewise;

KJV Romans 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

The passage ends with Jesus declaring of himself: “For the son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.”

II. Spiritual gleanings:

1. Have you like Zacchaeus sought Jesus to see who he is? How do you do this?

You go to where he is. Where might he be found?

1 Peter 1:11 says that the “spirit of Christ” might be found in the Scriptures.

He is found in the gatherings of his people (Matt 18:20). He is there in the preaching of his word (Eph 4:21 says we are “taught by him”).

2. Have you realized that if you have found Christ, that, in truth, it was he who found you?

We have no ground of boasting. He loved us before we ever loved him.

3. Has Christ come to abide in your house?

Has he entered your life and have you received him gladly?

4. Has Christ's abiding in you led to a transformed life?

Has it resulted in a spirit of generosity and self-giving and ministry that flows from you as naturally as water from a spring? Has Christ customized a manner of expressing your faith in a way that is just suited for who you are?

Has it even led you even to make retribution as far as you are able and it is appropriate to do so for past wrongs you have done? If not, are there some things that the Spirit would nudge you even today to consider doing?

5. Do you understand that the status that you have been given in Christ?

If you are in Christ, you are a son of Abraham.

6. Do you see Jesus as the Seeker and Savior of the Lost?

Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4 that the Father is seeking true worshipper to worship him in Spirit and in Truth. He turns lost men and women into true worshippers. See him not as distant and devoid of passion, but see his eyes ever searching the horizon, looking to rescue the lost. This is the heart of our Lord.

Message Six: Jesus and his Enemies

“Christ’s Intercessory Prayer From the Cross”

Luke 23:34–43

CRBC September 21, 2014

Today we visit the place which is called Calvary to once again hear and meditate upon the inspired account of our Lord’s sufferings upon the cross.

In this scene we will hear Jesus’ breathtaking announcement of forgiveness even upon those who have nailed him to the cross.

And we will eventually see two very different responses to Jesus from the malefactors who are crucified alongside Jesus. Luke faithfully records the events as they happened, but he also does so with a spiritual purpose. More is said than is being said. In the very different responses of the two thieves to Jesus, we see a paradigm or a model of how men will respond to the preaching of Jesus, to the preaching of the gospel. Some will see and hear and turn away in scorn and mockery. Others will see and hear and be moved to believe and to entrust their lives to him.

I. Exposition:

Again, the crucifixion of Jesus is described very simply and briefly in v. 33. It is described with great restraint and without distracting detail as to the pain and suffering that Jesus endured humanly speaking. Geldenhuys:

Crucifixion was the most agonizing and shameful form of execution ever devised (the Romans confined this form of punishment to slaves and criminals of the lowest type), and yet the physical agony which Jesus had to endure was but the faintest reflection of the spiritual suffering He had to undergo as the Bearer of the sin of lost mankind. For this reason the Gospels give practically no details of His physical suffering, so that the reader’s attention should not be concentrated upon

outward things and thus overlook the deepest essence of His suffering. What a pity that in so much Christian art His physical sufferings have been brought so greatly into prominence (p. 608).

In our passage today we have added to this just a few further discreet yet highly significant descriptions of some of the things that happened while Jesus was on the cross. This is really all that Luke records of Jesus' experience on the cross until he begins to describe his death in vv. 44 and ff.

We can divide our passage into two scenes:

- 1. The mockery and humiliation and Jesus experienced upon the cross (vv. 34–38);**
- 2. The two responses to Jesus from the malefactors who are crucified with him (vv. 39–43).**

Notice that in both of these scenes, Luke records a statement from Jesus as he is being crucified. These are both unique to the Gospel of Luke alone.

You may know that Christians have traditionally spoken of the seven words of Jesus from the cross, drawn from all four Gospels:

From Matthew and Mark: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

From Luke: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

“Verily I say unto thee, to day thou shalt be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

“Father into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

And from John: “Woman, behold thy son!” and “Behold thy mother!” (John 19:26–27).

“I thirst” (John 19:28).

“It is finished” (John 19:30).

Our text begins with a word from Jesus (v. 34), and it ends with a word from Jesus (v. 43).

First: The mockery and humiliation and Jesus experienced upon the cross (vv. 34–38):

Again, we start with Luke’s record of a Jesus speaking from the cross. He has just been unjustly condemned to death, forced to carry his cross till he broke down under its weight and Simon of Cyrene was conscripted from the crowd to help him in bearing it, and nailed to the despised tree.

And the first thing we hear from Jesus is this: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do....”

Unsurprisingly Christians have through the years come to know these as some of the most precious words ever spoken by our Lord. What does he do on the cross? As the Son, as the Mediator, he begins to intercede on behalf of those who are crucifying him.

This statement demonstrates the integrity of our Lord, as he puts into practice what he had taught his disciples when he said in the Sermon on the Plain:

KJV Luke 6:27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

Indeed, he practices what he preaches!

What did Jesus mean when he said, “They know not what they do”? We know he was not saying that those who were the agents of his crucifixion were spiritually guiltless and without sin. Some of them, no doubt, had not real understanding of his claims to being the Christ. They were simply following orders. They were not guiltless but they were unaware of the magnitude of their sin in rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and in putting to death the Prince of Life. Recall his words to Judas (22:22).

Some have wondered at these words given the fact that the Father did bring temporal judgment upon Jerusalem in 70 AD, as Jesus himself predicted (“and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles” 21:24).

How did God the Father in his wisdom answer Jesus’ prayer?
Geldenhuys:

After the people of Jerusalem had tempted heaven by casting out Jesus in this manner and causing Him to be crucified, the Father, who is also the God of history, gave them for another forty long years the opportunity, through the mighty signs of Pentecost and the ministry of the apostles and other believers, to repent in time and to be saved. Several thousands made use of this period of grace and were saved, but the majority were in their folly precipitated into the abyss (p. 609).

In these words, we see and hear the essence of who Jesus is as our Savior. He intercedes with the Father for the very men who crucify him. Recall Paul’s words:

KJV Romans 5:7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

What Jesus does on the cross is a once for all sacrifice. His atoning death has no need of replication and indeed cannot be replicated by believers. These are the limits of a WWJD (“What would Jesus do?”) view of Christian ethics. And yet there is another sense in which what Jesus says and does on the cross is the model for how believers are to respond to injustice and to unjust suffering (whether emotional, verbal, or physical—we all know that invisible wounds can sometimes be more painful and detrimental than visible ones).

In 1 Peter 2 the apostle addresses Christian servants who had to put up with abuse from their masters, and this is his counsel to them:

KJV 1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example [hypogrammos—a writing copy to follow], that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23 Who,

when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

Now, I am not suggesting that people who have endured great grief, suffering, and abuse should just turn around quickly and utter words of forgiveness. Yet, I am amazed that this is what Jesus does on the cross. He does not allow any “root of bitterness” (Heb 12:15) to spring up. Notice that with these words Jesus is not immediately reconciled to these men who are putting him to death. There is no observable change in their words or actions. In fact, as we shall see, quite the opposite transpires. But he says it anyway. The point is that he intercedes for them because of some change he sees in them. His words show that his own spirit is not fouled with bitterness and hatred of the men who are doing him wrong. But he can earnestly and honestly intercede on their behalf to the Father. He desires to see men who hate God and who have rejected God to be reconciled to God. The question is that as a follower of Jesus, how are we also to demonstrate this kind of spirit?

Consider the example of Stephen in Acts 7:

KJV Acts 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Linger over that last verse: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Stephen sounds like his Master. He responds to injustice the way Jesus did.

Again, what is the response to Jesus after these words of unbelievable charity and graciousness which show the magnitude of his heart, they

continue to crucify him, including humiliating, mocking, and belittling him.

From vv. 34b–38 with an incredible economy of words Luke describes at least five things that Jesus underwent (each introduced with the conjunction *de* or *kai*).

First, his clothing was divided among the soldier who crucified him: “And they parted his raiment and cast lots” (v. 34b):

This was apparently a common practice among the soldiers charged with carrying out crucifixions and a petty way they could make a little extra money, by taking the very clothes of their victim.

In the case of Jesus, unbeknownst to them, it was a fulfillment of the Scriptures:

KJV Psalm 22:16 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. 17 I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. 18 They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

John provides more detail and makes the fulfillment of Scripture explicit:

KJV John 19:23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. 24 They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

This detail shows the humiliation of Jesus. Certainly as a Jewish man he would have been modest in his dress and appearance. His nakedness is here exposed as was the first Adam, though Jesus is without sin.

It also demonstrates how Jesus has been disrobed and abandoned by even his closest friends and disciples. He goes to the cross absolutely alone with no covering or support.

In some ways this little reference perhaps reflects even the miracle of the Incarnation. That Jesus left all the riches and glories of heaven.

As Paul puts it:

KJV 2 Corinthians 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

And: He emptied himself and became obedient, even to the death of the cross (cf. Phil 2:5–11).

Second, “And the people stood beholding [theoreo, the root for the English word “theory”] (v. 35a):

Compare Psalm 22:17: “they look and stare upon me.”

Many in that crowd simply had come to see the execution. But there were also disciples in that crowd: the grieving women (v. 27) and maybe even some disciples incognito. And there were likely also some who would become disciples. It is interesting that Luke never says that the whole people began to revile Jesus as he is crucified but only certain ones (the rulers and the soldiers).

Third, the rulers belittled him (v. 35b):

Rather than leading the people in doing good, these lead in doing evil. They deride Jesus and mock him in particular for his ability to save his people as their Messiah. In so doing, they mock Jesus as a Priest. They also mock the titles ascribed to Jesus as Christ and his role as the “Chosen [eklektos, the Elect] of God.” The irony: He is all that they say He isn’t.

Fourth, the soldiers mock him (vv. 36–37):

This is now at least the fourth time that Jesus has suffered at the hands of soldiers: at the high priest’s house (22:63–64); before Herod (23:11); before Pilate (John 19:1–2); and now here at Calvary.

The mockery takes two forms:

First, they offer him vinegar (v. 36). This is a cruel mockery of his thirst. We know Jesus was offered wine, as a drug to dull his pain, when first crucified, but he refused it. Compare:

KJV Matthew 27:34 They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

According to John 19:29 they also put vinegar to his lips just before he died. Luke alone, however, tells us this early offering of vinegar in some form of mockery.

Second, they mock him with their words. Like Herod's men and the rulers they mock both his kingship and his priesthood (v. 37).

Fifth, a superscription [epigraphe] is placed over Jesus in the letters of three languages: Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: "This is the King of the Jews." John 19:19 says specifically: "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross." He, no doubt, did this as a jab at the Jews who had insisted on Jesus' death. Compare:

KJV John 19:21 Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. 22 Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

Aside from the irony that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This title is important for at least two other reasons:

First, it anticipates the Great Commission. People of all nations (Greeks, Romans, and Jews) will be drawn to Christ.

Second, it anticipates his taking the title of our crimes upon himself. Consider:

KJV Colossians 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

In the next scene we will see: The two responses to Jesus from the malefactors who are crucified with him (vv. 39–43).

II. Applications:

In the end the most profound thing that we are left to contemplate are the words of our Lord's intercession upon the cross.

1. Consider what Jesus endured for you.

Consider, if you are among the elect, how Jesus interceded for you and how he interceded before you were even born. You were the object of that prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

2. Consider the pattern that Jesus has given you to follow:

To whom might you need to intercede before the Father, whether reconciled or not, saying, "Father forgive them..."?

If Christ has shown himself to be the ultimate friend of sinners, then he calls upon us to follow his pattern and to be a friend of sinners.

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