

Thoughts on Luke

2010 April 20th for May 28th

Luke is the most verbose and detailed of the Gospels. It is the one I would have written....

While Matthew and Mark are similar, Luke seems to have a different point of view. The author of Luke is also credited with writing the Acts of the Apostles and so provides the most detailed and direct history of Jesus' life, ministry, and its impact, that are available to us.

Thought once I considered doing so to be the ideal attitude, I find it difficult today to put myself into the first century Judean world and mind in which these events occurred. The work of Jesus is timeless, however, and is to speak to people of all times and places. Even so, that teaching comes to us through an Israelite teacher born and raised in a blue collar household, and his unlikely band of Galilean followers from all working and social classes. This being the case, we must bridge the gap of time and culture to hear his recorded teaching for what it is supposed to say to us. Are our eyes and ears open, or are they closed, preventing us from understanding, as Jesus said of many of those following him, even then?

The reading of the rest of the Bible has been our attempt at understanding the culture and history of Jesus. If God were going to enter and visit his creation he wouldn't, after all, just pop in randomly, or in a way radically different from the way the rest of us come and go, he would create a race of people and find a special central place and time within that race to enter and to exit, pretty much like the other people enter and exit, through birth and death. Those people would be God's people and they would be important in the history of the world before and after God himself. Even so, they would be human like the rest of us, prone to error and side track. Jesus would have to bend their traditions and observance and religious institutions beyond the breaking point to maintain his own integrity. Apart from this visit, in order to be a sustaining force rather than political target, God might remain intensely present but invisible to the senses the rest of the time. At least this is what we observe, so to speak.

So, as we near the end of our journey through the entire Protestant Bible we once again come to the most complete and detailed story of God as one of us humans.

Luke 1:1 - 25

2010 April 20th for May 31st

Luke addresses his narrative to a specific reader.

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know for certainty of the things you have been taught.”

The story of Jesus begins with his aunt and uncle, Elizabeth and Zechariah, a priest. Though they were blameless and upright they had no children. It says, "Elizabeth was barren." This was not exactly a curse, but was considered a disgrace in the culture, as we will see.

One day, it was Zechariah's group's turn to serve in the temple and he was the one chosen to go into the Holy of Holies to burn the incense. This was a once in a lifetime honor. While he was doing this, others were outside praying.

"Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense." Zechariah was terrified but the angel told him not to be afraid. The angel then gave this message:

"Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous -- to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah asked how he could be sure of this, being old, and Elizabeth being old. This questioning provoked the angel who now identified himself and gave a stinging rebuke:

"I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

Later when Mary asks similar questions, she will not be rebuked. This is usually interpreted as a difference of attitude. Mary actually needed information, the interpretation goes, while Zechariah was apparently doubting an angel who stands in the presence of God, though he did not know all this while he was doing the doubting.

While this was going on the people outside were wondering what Zechariah was doing in there and why he was taking so long. This was the observance where only one priest was allowed to go into the inner room. A rope was tied around him so that if he died while serving he could be pulled out without breaking the rule.

When he did come out (alive) he was unable to speak and was making signs to the people. They realized he had seen a vision but it is not clear whether or not he was able to communicate what it was.

After his group's duty rotation ended he went home to Elizabeth. She became pregnant and was secluded for five months. In reference to her prior disgrace she said:

“The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

Luke 1:26 - 56

2010 April 21st for June 1st

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the angel visited Mary. Mary was betrothed to a carpenter named Joseph, but she was a virgin. Gabriel greeted Mary:

“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Mary found this greeting quite troubling but the angel continued with reassurance:

“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Mary asked: “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

I have to admit that this is a more reasonable question than Zachariah’s which was only, “How can I be sure?”

The answer to Mary was:

“The Holy Spirit will come up on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.”

Mary replied simply:

“I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”

Mary hurried and went to visit Elizabeth in the hill country. “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” She shouted, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!”

Mary said,

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”

Mary stayed three more months then went home.

This final detail may be an important indication that Joseph should not be thought the father of Mary’s child.

Luke 1:57 - 80

2010 April 23rd for June 2nd

When the time came, Elizabeth delivered a son. Everyone was joyous, understanding that God had shown her great mercy. When the day of circumcision came (when the boy was eight days old) everyone presumed that he would be named Zechariah, after his father, but Elizabeth spoke up and said that his name was John. This was confusing to the people because there were no relatives named John, so they asked his father Zechariah. He called for a writing tablet and wrote on it,

“His name is John.”

At that instant he was able to speak again and praised God. The people were amazed at this and wondered what the boy would become.

Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied:

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us --

to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham;

to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins

because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

John grew in strength and spirit and “lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.”

Speculation is that John’s parents were old and might have died while he was still young and that he lived subsistence in the desert as a result. Other, not necessarily competing, speculation is that this monastic, Nazarite, youth with God in the wilderness was the means by which he was trained for his ministry.

Luke 2:1 - 20

2010 April 23rd for June 3rd

During the reign of Caesar Augustus, he ordered a census of the whole Roman world. Everyone went to their towns to be registered. This meant that Joseph, who was of the house of David, went to Bethlehem. His fiancée Mary came with him. So many people were in town that there were no rooms and they stayed in the stable with the animals. While they were there the time came and Jesus was born.

Shepherds in the fields on the night watch were startled when suddenly an angel appeared surrounded by light. They were terrified but the angel said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

A manger is an animal feed trough.

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

““Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.””

When the host departed, the shepherds decided to go into town and see what was up. They found it just as the angel had said, Jesus was lying in a manger with Mary and Joseph there. They spread the word and all who heard it were amazed. They returned to their fields praising God.

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

Luke 2:21 - 51

2010 April 23rd for June 4th

“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.”

After this, the Law of Moses required a purification ritual for Mary. The poor person's version of this was to bring a pair of doves or pigeons for a sacrifice. They brought Jesus and the offering to the temple.

Two noteworthy people were there that day, Simeon, who was prompted by the Spirit to come up to the temple at that time, and Anna, a woman who had been a widow for decades and was always in the temple worshipping, praying, and fasting, night and day.

Simeon, realizing who the child was, took him in his arms and praised God:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

He also said to Mary directly, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Anna, in turn, “gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

As Jesus grew up the family went to Jerusalem every year for the Passover. When Jesus was twelve they went up as usual and after the feast was over were returning home. After a day of travel they found that Jesus was not in the crowd. They returned to Jerusalem to look for him and, after three days of searching, found him in the temple where he was “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

“When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’” Jesus replied,

“Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?”

They did not understand what he was talking about.

Jesus' form of rebellion was to sit in the temple sparring with the teachers of the Law.

They returned to Nazareth where Jesus was obedient to his parents. “But his mother treasured these things in her heart.”

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

The Word of God came to John the Baptist in the desert in the fifteenth year of Tiberias Caesar. Crowds gathered to hear John preach and to be baptized. The message was this:

“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

The people, startled and puzzled, asked what they should do. In reply, John preached socialism.

“The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.”

When tax collectors asked, he tailored the message to them: try simple fairness.

“Don’t collect any more than you are required to.”

And for soldiers,

“Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely -- be content with your pay.”

These directives give us an idea of the professional practices at that time and place.

Some thought that John might be the Christ and were waiting around to see. To them he answered,

“I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Hellfire right there in the warmup act!

“But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.”

Luke 3:21 - 37

2010 May 11th for June 8th

While John was baptizing the masses, Jesus also came to be baptized. As Jesus was praying, “heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

Jesus was thirty. He was thought to be the son of Joseph. These are the ancestors of Joseph:

Heli, Matthat, Levi, Melki, Jannai, Joseph, Mattathias, Amos, Nahum, Esli, Naggai, Maath, Mattathias, Semein, Josech, Joda, Joanan, Rhesa, Zerubbabel, Shealtiel, Neri, Melki, Addi, Cosam, Elmadam, Er, Joshua, Eliezer, Jorim, Matthat, Levi, Simeon, Judah, Joseph, Jonam, Eliakim, Melea, Menna, Mattatha, Nathan, and David, the king.

David you will recall, was son of Jesse, son of Obed, Boaz, Salmon, Nahshon, Amminadab, Ram, Hezron, Perez, Judah, Jacob, Isaac, son of Abraham.

Abraham was son of Terah, son of Nahor, Serug, Reu, Peleg, Eber, Shelah, Cainan, Arphaxad, Shem, Noah, Lamech, Methuselah, Enoch, Jared, Mahalalel, Kenan, Enosh, Seth, son of Adam, son of God.

Luke 4:1 - 30

2010 May 15th for June 9th

Immediately following his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led out to the desert where he fasted for 40 days and was tempted by the devil.

There were three temptations and three answers.

Devil: "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus: "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

Devil: "I will give you all [the kingdoms of the world's] authority and splendor, ... if you worship me."

Jesus: "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

Devil: "Throw yourself down from [the top of the temple.] For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; / they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus: "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Note that Jesus always answers with scripture. We are, as they were, "people of the book."

Notice that the devil also uses scripture, at least at the end.

After this Jesus returned to Galilee and Nazareth where he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He was given the scroll to read and unrolled it to the place where it said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,

to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

He then rolled the scroll back up, handed it in, and said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Everyone was amazed. Everyone said, “Isn't this Joseph's son?”

Jesus continued by preaching to them.

“Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’

“I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarepath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed -- only Naaman the Syrian.”

This made everyone present furious. They got up and drove him to the edge of a cliff and were going to throw him over when “he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.”

These were apparently scriptures that the observant synagogue-goers of Jesus time were used to ignoring, or at least interpreting differently, in that they would have challenged their “Jews are a more blessed people” assumptions.

Luke 4:31 - 44

2010 May 15th for June 10th

Jesus continued to Capernaum and taught people there. They were amazed because his teaching had authority.

There was a demon possessed man in the synagogue who started yelling loud as he could, “Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are -- the Holy One of God!”

Thus the demons announce Jesus' identity.

Jesus said, “Be quiet! Come out of him!” The demon threw the man down but came out without injuring him.

The people were amazed that he had this authority too.

From the synagogue, they went to Simon's house where Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever. Jesus “rebuked the fever” and it left and she got up and served them.

Many people heard of this and brought all their sick to Jesus to such a degree that he couldn't move about. At daybreak he went out of town to an isolated place and they followed, but he did not stay there, he told them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." He taught this in all the synagogues of Judea.

Jesus was not here primarily to heal people, but did so to demonstrate that the presence of the kingdom of God meant restoration of the creation.

Luke 5:1 - 16

2010 May 25th for June 11th

Jesus was by the Lake of Gennesaret one day in a large crowd. Some fishermen had pulled their boats up to the shore and Jesus got in one of them and asked the owner, who turned out to be Peter, to push out a little way. From there, Jesus sat and taught the crowd.

When he was done he told the crew to go on out to deep water and cast their nets. Peter protested that they had worked hard all night and hadn't caught anything but if Jesus wanted them to they would go on out and fish again, and they did. Jesus didn't leave them destitute that day.

The catch was so large that the boat started to sink (that is, more than a ton of fish), and another boat had to come help them. Peter, in awe, said to Jesus, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

Peter's business partners, James and John, sons of Zebedee were also astonished.

"Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

Later, in a town, a man came to Jesus who was "covered in leprosy." He begged, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Without any of the sparring or discussion that accompanied other healings, Jesus said that he was in fact willing and reached out his hand saying, "Be clean!" And the leprosy was gone. Jesus told the man to go make the appropriate Mosaic sacrifice for the cleansing but otherwise not to tell anyone. Nonetheless, news about Jesus spread and crowds followed him everywhere.

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Luke 5:17 - 39

2010 May 25th for June 14th

Jesus was teaching in a house one day and the crowd was so large and packed that no one could get in, including four people who were carrying a paralyzed friend on a mat. To get to Jesus they went up on the roof, dug a hole in it, and let the man down on a mat right in front of Jesus.

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’”

The religious establishment in the crowd heard this as blasphemy. Only God could forgive sins. Jesus knew they were thinking this and asked the rhetorical question which was easier, to heal a paralytic or forgive sins? Then, to prove his point he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” The formerly paralyzed man did this, to everyone’s amazement. Everyone went home praising God, including the healed man and his friends.

Later, Jesus, in his travels, passed a tax collector’s booth manned by Levi. Jesus told Levi to follow him. “Levi got up, left everything and followed him.” He threw a big banquet for Jesus and had his multitude of friends over, including tax collectors. The religious establishment wondered why Jesus would hang out with such a crowd of obvious sinners. His answer was, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

After that they asked him about fasting. John’s disciples fasted, why not Jesus’? He replied that the friends of the groom didn’t fast at the wedding, that there would be time enough later for fasting. He also said,

“No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.”

But, in a coda, perhaps aimed at those who might think that old was therefore evil and new good, “And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”

Or maybe he is saying that the old timers, the establishment, will be hard to convert to the new, good or bad.

In any case, Jesus doesn’t seem to be against the drinking of wine.

Luke 6:1 - 16

2010 May 25th for June 15th

When someone is effective, they will increasingly start to challenge their establishment and that establishment will fight them. The more effective, the bigger the fight. This was now happening to Jesus. The God-following establishment (old wine and new wine notwithstanding) was threatened and they were looking for ways to accuse, invalidate, and get rid of Jesus.

One Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples were passing through fields on the way to the next town, “harvesting” a little grain as they went and eating it. This activity in itself was lawful, a way of provisioning the poor, but “harvesting” on the Sabbath was not. This gave the establishment a means to challenge Jesus, and Jesus turned it into a lesson about the Scriptures and what the

Sabbath was really for in the first place. In short, man did not exist so that the Sabbath could be observed but the Sabbath existed for the benefit of those who observed it.

This despite the fact that Moses had had a man stoned for gathering wood on the Sabbath, another form of harvesting. That incident is often interpreted as some form of defiance or other bad attitude, but the account doesn't go into motives and attitudes so we don't know this directly. It could be that Moses just went in, used the Urim and Thummim, and the guy lost the roll.

Anyway, the example Jesus used was of David eating the consecrated bread in the temple that day when he and his men were hungry. No one was supposed to eat that bread but the priests, but, well, the king, the Lord's Anointed, was hungry. What to do?

On another Sabbath, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand right in Synagogue. Merciful and appropriate as this seems, it made the establishment furious because it was, in essence, work done on the Sabbath. They started plotting.

One day Jesus spent all night on a mountain praying by himself. When morning came, he came and chose his twelve disciples: Simon (Peter), Andrew (Peter's brother), Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (also called "Zealot"), Judas (son of James), and Judas Iscariot, who would be the traitor.

Luke 6:17 - 36

2010 June 4th for 16th

A large crowd followed Jesus to a large level place where he healed the sick and taught them the basics.

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated prophets."

The downtrodden are blessed. Next, the uplifted are cursed. Some call this Jesus' "upside down kingdom."

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep,

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets."

Next in the “upside down” kingdom is policy on personal property, ownership, and the general principles of capitalism. But notice, on personal property behaviors, Jesus is not just telling his followers to accept oppression unchallenged. He is giving hints as to how the oppressed can give the oppressors a difficult time, offering the antagonists things that were illegal for them, poking the oppressors in the eye, as it were.

“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

The “credits” Jesus is offering here are quite unlike the credits one gains from automated day trading. What would happen to our system if no one expected repayment or accumulated anything but just shared with each other as needed?

Luke 6:37 - 49

2010 June 4th for 17th

Jesus continues his “upside down” teaching, rewarding in the kingdom of God system those who are never rewarded in the world system, pointing out the fallacies of being self-centered, saying that to follow him one must do as he says, which isn’t that difficult, except that it goes against all nature.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

“Can a blind man lead a blind man? will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

It seems to me that most houses built today would in fact collapse in a torrent, regardless of foundation, but that building codes would not allow for construction in a stream bed. Acts of God are sometimes avoidable, if not preventable.

Luke 7:1 - 23

2010 June 4th for 18th

Several of Jesus’ healing miracles are documented.

A Centurion approached Jesus for healing for his servant. Jesus offered to go with him but the Centurion told Jesus that he understood how authority worked, being a Centurion, and that all Jesus needed to do was to say the word and his servant would be well. Jesus marveled at this calling it great faith but I wonder if it wasn’t also an indication of an uncommon level of depth of social understanding. Who in first century Palestine would have thought that miraculous healing could also be done by delegation, much less remotely? Jesus granted the remote healing and it is documented that it occurred.

Passing through a town called Nain, Jesus and his group encountered a funeral procession. It was a widow burying her son. The back story here, something that a reader or hearer in the culture would know without explanation, was that a son-less widow would now be destitute, not having a man to provide for her. In any case, Jesus restored the son to life and sent everyone on their way. News of events like this kept spreading throughout the region.

When the disciples of John the Baptist reported all this to John, he sent them to Jesus to ask if he was the promised one. (There is no mention here, as there was in Matthew and Mark, that John was in prison at this time over the Herodias preaching affair.)

Jesus said, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”

This is the same answer that Jesus gave in the other Gospels, but does not have the same urgency of priority that it did when we knew that John was in prison. Would Jesus let those in his kingdom be kept in prison in this world while he continued his teaching and healing? Yes he would.

Luke 7:24 - 50

2010 June 5th for 21st

Rhetorically, Jesus discussed John the Baptist with the crowd. What was it that the crowds had gone out into the desert to see anyway? Fine clothing? Palaces? No. The prophet from God, the messenger sent to prepare the way for the Messiah.

“I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

A parenthetical note is then added saying that the secular sinners such as tax collectors had accepted baptism from John, but the religious leaders had not. “The Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves.”

And then Jesus contrasted styles to show that nothing would make the people happy. John came fasting and temperant and was accused of having a demon. Jesus came eating and drinking and was accused of being a glutton and drunkard and hanging out with worse. People who don’t want to be pleased can’t be pleased.

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus over for dinner. A woman from the town “who had lived a sinful life” crashed the party. She wet Jesus feet with tears and dried them with her hair then poured perfume on them. This was uncomfortable for the assembled crowd. Simon thought Jesus did not know who the woman was that he would allow such a display. Jesus spoke to Simon about it directly.

“Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

Simon answered correctly that it was the one with the greater debt. Jesus then completed the analogy.

“Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven -- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”

Jesus then forgave her sins, causing another stir on the crowd. And he said to the woman:

“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

It does not say how the rest of the dinner went after Jesus had pointed out all of his host’s shortcomings.

Luke 8:1 - 25

2010 June 5th for 22nd

As Jesus went from town to town “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God,” followed by his disciples and some of the women, he also told parables. One was about a farmer who sowed seeds in three kinds of ground: some along the path, some among rocks, and some in good ground. In addition, some seed was eaten by birds. When the crop was harvested, only the good ground did much, and it did quite well, producing a hundred times yield.

The disciples asked what this meant. Jesus said that only they could know the meaning so that the rest of the people, “though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.”

The seed was the word of God. The three types of soil, or hearts, were those who were shallow without root, or were choked by the concerns of this life. In addition, the devil would steal from some. Those with good hearts retained the word and produced greatly from it.

“No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

These are apparently truths in both kingdoms, God’s and this world’s. It doesn’t seem fair that whoever has will get more and whoever does not have will lose even what they have, does it? But this theme will come up again and maybe we will find more insights as we go along.

Jesus relatives couldn’t get to him through the crowd and he did not make space for them. “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice,” he said. There is no elaboration on why he said this, but it was remarkable then, and is remarkable now that he would essentially disown his family.

As they were crossing the lake in a boat a big storm came up. The disciples feared they would drown. Meanwhile, Jesus was sleeping. They woke him and he got up and “rebuked the wind and the raging waters. The storm ended. “Where is your faith,” he asked them.

“In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

Luke 8:26 - 56

2010 June 5th for 23rd

In the boat, Jesus and the disciples sailed on to an area that was mostly Gentile. There were herds of pigs there. There was also a man who was possessed by many demons. They were so powerful that he could not be chained or restrained, but he kept getting loose and running out into the wild places.

Jesus conversed with the demons asking them their name. They said they were Legion and they repeatedly begged him not to send them into the “Abyss.” They asked instead to go into a herd of pigs, which Jesus permitted. This resulted, however, in the pigs stampeding down the slope into the lake and drowning. The herders were terrified and came and asked Jesus to leave the area. Jesus agreed to leave and though the healed man wanted to go with him, he told the man to stay behind and proclaim what had happened to him throughout the Gentile regions. Plan B?

At another town a synagogue ruler named Jarius had a sick daughter. Jesus was going with him to his home to heal the girl but the crowd was nearly crushing him. While this was happening, a woman who had been bleeding for a dozen years touched his clothes, in faith that the act would heal her. Jesus knew that it had happened and asked who, in the crushing crowd, had touched him. The woman finally had to confess. Jesus said, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

Meanwhile, Jarius daughter died and servants came from the house to tell him not to bother Jesus with the matter any more. When it rains it pours. Jesus went on, however, saying, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”

When he got to the house mourners were already mourning and they made fun of him for wanting to do anything about the girl, but he privately took his three closest disciples: Peter, John, and James, and went into the girl’s room and brought her back to life. Jesus told the parents to feed her and not tell anyone anything about the matter. This must have been an impossible direction to follow. The house was already full of mourners expecting a funeral.

Luke 9:1 - 27

2010 June 9th for 24th

Jesus gave his twelve disciples authority to drive out all demons and heal the sick then sent them out in pairs to preach and minister. He told them not to take anything extra on the trip, not even money, but to subsist on the hospitality of the people in the towns where they visited. If they were treated well they were to bless the places and if not they were to “shake the dust off” their feet when leaving.

When Herod heard about all that was going on he was confused. He thought he had beheaded John the Baptist. If John was still dead, then who was this?

After the disciples returned from their mission, they tried to retreat with Jesus to a private place but the crowds learned where they were going and followed them. Jesus “welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.” That afternoon the disciples suggested that Jesus send the crowds away to the local villages to buy food, but Jesus told them to feed the people. “They answered, ‘We have only five loaves of bread and two fish -- unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.’” There were about five thousand men in the crowd. Jesus told them to have everyone sit down in groups of fifty then he took the little food they had, asked the blessing, and passed it out to everyone. When the leftovers were cleaned up there were twelve baskets full.

Jesus asked the disciples who the people thought he was. Some thought Elijah or another prophet, some thought John the Baptist. Jesus asked who they, the disciples, thought he was. Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” Jesus “strictly warned” them not to say anything about this to anyone. Then Jesus told them of his future:

“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

We discussed “will not taste death” at some length back in Mark.

Luke 9:18 - 45

2010 June 10th for 25th

Jesus took his closest followers, Peter, James, and John, up on a mountain to pray. While praying, Jesus face and clothes became bright like lightening and he was joined by Moses and Elijah who were also dazzling. Peter, startled, started saying that they should build shelters for the three of them, but even while he babbled a cloud enveloped the mountain and a voice in the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” After that they found that they were alone again.

The next day at the bottom of the mountain there was a large crowd including a man who had a possessed son who the other disciples had been unable to help. Jesus was annoyed. “O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you and put with you? Bring

your son here.” The boy convulsed even as he was being brought. “But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father.” Everyone was amazed.

While the marveling was still going on, Jesus said privately to his disciples, “Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.”

This was probably the message from Moses and Elijah but the disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying and they were afraid to ask.

Luke 9:46 - 62

2010 June 10th for 28th

The disciples argued among themselves about which of them was greatest. Jesus showed them a child and said, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all -- he is the greatest.”

More upside-down-ness.

About competition, the disciples reported that they had encountered a man driving out demons in Jesus name, though he was not one of the followers. Was Jesus exclusive?

“Do not stop him for whoever is not against you is for you.”

Jesus set out resolutely to get to Jerusalem where his fate awaited. On the way he sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village, but, in a racist or regionalist or religionist response, they were not welcoming because Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. James and John asked if they should call down destruction from heaven on this town but Jesus rebuked them. In short, no, they should not. The Samaritan town was no fig tree.

As they progressed towards Jerusalem, they encountered several potential disciples. Jesus sent each of them away with very anti-cultural sounding reasoning.

One said, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

Answer, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

So much for creature comforts in the ministry.

Jesus called another to follow and the man replied, “First let me go bury my father.”

Answer, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Another offered, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."

Answer, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

So much for familial obligations. Or maybe there are back stories here that are not told to us.

Luke 10:1 - 24

2010 June 14th for 29th

Jesus sent out another group on a mission trip, this time seventy-two missionaries, in pairs. These were the directions:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: 'The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."

Sodom had also been inhospitable in its day.

Jesus then bemoaned all the towns that rejected him and the fate that awaited them as well.

When the trip was over, the seventy-two came back rejoicing. Even the demons submitted to them when they used Jesus' name.

Jesus answered, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Jesus then praised God in the Spirit that the wise and learned were excluded from these things but they were instead revealed to children. He also praised God that he had received "all things" and that he was the only one who knew God, he and whomever he chose to reveal God.

To his disciples he said, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

Luke 10:25 - 41

2010 June 16th for 30th

A legal expert asked Jesus what one had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him what he read in scripture. The answer was, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;” and, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus said this was correct. “Do this and you will live.”

The man, looking for an angle, asked exactly who his neighbor was. In reply, Jesus told a story about a Samaritan.

A man was robbed and beaten and left to die on the side of the road. A priest and a Levite both respected members of society, both encountered the scene and walked by on the other side of the road, not wanting to get involved. A Samaritan (Samaritans were hated by the Jews hearing this story, being “half breeds”) came up and had pity and took the man into his care and bandaged him up and left him at an inn with instructions that he would pay for whatever was needed.

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” Jesus asked.

The answer, of course, was the one who had shown mercy, regardless of heritage. The lawyer answering did not use the word ‘Samaritan,’ he used the phrase “one who had mercy.”

Jesus then instructed, “Go and do likewise.”

In a village, Jesus and his group were invited into the home of a woman named Martha. She had a sister, Mary, who sat at Jesus feet and listened to his teaching. This was man’s work, listening to teaching, the women were supposed to be serving, so Martha complained to Jesus about Mary’s behavior.

Jesus answered, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 11:1 - 28

2010 June 16th for July 1st

Jesus was praying one day and when he finished the disciples asked him to teach them how to pray. The version of the Lord’s Prayer given here is abridged from what we use. (That version is found in another Gospel).

“Father,
hallowed by your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each ay our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.”

Then in parables he teaches them some other things about prayer, about persistent prayer.

A friend comes to another friend’s house in the middle of the night wanting something to eat. The man inside calls out that he is already in bed with his children around him and cannot get up. But, the pleader, due to his persistence, or as it says, “boldness,” will finally prevail on his friend to get up and give him whatever he needs. Not because he is a friend but because he is annoying in the middle of the night -- persistent.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

God will give good things. What child when asking for a fish will be given a snake by their parent? God is much a better parent than parents.

Next, Jesus was driving out a mute demon and the religious standing around accused him of driving out demons by Beelzebub, that is, the devil. It is unfortunate that we can’t see the emotion, the body language, in Jesus’ response here. The way it reads, they got a real rise out of him.

He started by saying that their claim was ridiculous because “a kingdom divided against itself will be ruined.” Anyway, if I am using Beelzebub, who do *you* drive them out by? A strong man guards his house but if someone stronger comes along he overpowers the strong man and takes his possessions.

Jesus here casts himself as the robber, of the devil’s house.

“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.”

Notice that this is the opposite of what he said a few days ago, “Whoever is not against you is for you.”

And watch out. An evil spirit cast out goes through the desert looking for rest and, finding none, returns to the house from which it left, finding it clean and well kept.

A woman in the crowd shouted out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed *rather* are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

My emphasis.

Luke 11:29 - 54

2010 June 16th for July 2nd

The crowds were growing and Jesus lectured them about wanting to see miraculous signs. “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” All sorts of important people in the Bible would rise up and condemn this generation in the judgment: Jonah, the Queen of the South, Solomon, and the men of Nineveh to whom Jonah preached. They had repented, after all.

Jonah is in our Bible because of this reference by Jesus.

People do not light a light then hide it. The eye is the lamp of the body. If it is clear the body is illuminated, if not, the body is dark.

A Pharisee invited Jesus over to eat but when he came in, noted that Jesus did not wash before reclining to dine. The Pharisee was surprised at this. Jesus instructed his host:

“Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

“Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it.”

It is hard to imagine that anyone at this point felt much like eating, washed or not. A legal expert sided with his Pharisee friend, pointing out that Jesus was insulting the legal experts too. Jesus proceeded to give them their turn.

“And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

“Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

“Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”

Perhaps dirt was shaken off of Jesus’ feet that evening.

After this, the Pharisees and legal experts, unified against Jesus, worked against him fiercely in the way that was important to them, by trying to trip him up with legal or religious questions.

Luke 12:1 - 34

2010 June 19th for July 5th

The crowd around Jesus was so large, many thousand, that people were trampling each other. Jesus taught his disciples more about the Pharisees, their religious establishment:

“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

“I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”

In response to someone in the crowd who wanted Jesus to make his brother divide up his inheritance with him, Jesus said that he was not an arbiter in their case. He then delivered a

parable on greed. A rich man had so much that he tore down his barns and built bigger ones. He was set for life. Then, that night, he died. What good was it all to him then?

Jesus taught not to worry. Life is more than food and clothing. The birds eat all they need without worrying. The grass of the field is beautiful, more so than king Solomon, without worrying about its appearance. Then, it is gathered and thrown in the fire the next day. Worrying doesn't make your life any longer. Why bother? Seek God's kingdom instead.

Jesus concludes with round support for capitalism and materialism.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Luke 12:35 - 59

2010 June 19th for July 6th

Jesus taught readiness, particularly readiness of the servants for their master. Servants who were dressed and had the lamps burning when their master got home from a wedding, even in the middle of the night, were deserving. Those who took advantage of the long wait to abuse their fellow servants and get drunk would be caught and punished severely.

In a time with split second synchronization and instant communication, we have little idea what this is all about, but we do understand master-slave hierarchy.

“But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Jesus is referring to himself as the master and the disciples (which can include us) as the servants. Those who are deserving will be served by their master.

Like Revelation, I have not heard this next preached much recently.

“I have come to bring fire on earth and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Jesus lectured the crowd. They were able to read the weather and predict tomorrow's conditions. Don't be hypocrites and fail to interpret the signs of the current times. Don't be stupid in

disputes. If you are drug off to justice, deal with your accuser on the way so that you don't end up before the judge and in prison until the whole debt is repaid.

Luke 13:1 - 17

2010 June 19th for July 7th

Apparently Pilate had attacked some Galileans and mixed their blood with that of their sacrifices. Jesus was told about this. Recall that Jesus was a Galilean. We expect sympathy, indignation, or at least tribal identification. We get this:

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them -- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

So much for thousands of years of “God rewards the good” theology, before and since the first coming of Christ. Abraham was accounted righteous just for believing in God. The standard for repentance is now higher.

Jesus then told a parable about a tree that wasn't very productive. The owner wanted to cut it down so it would quit wasting space in his garden but the caretaker asked if he couldn't give it special treatment for a year before deciding.

No conclusion is drawn. The story is left open ended.

One Sabbath in a synagogue, Jesus healed a woman who was bent over and could not stand straight. When he healed her “she straightened up and praised God.” The ruler of the synagogue was indignant and instructed all present, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”

Jesus retorted, “You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

This humiliated Jesus' opponents.

You know, Moses didn't help this situation when, right after establishing the Sabbath rules in the Ten Commandments, they stoned a guy to death for gathering wood on the Sabbath. Just saying.

Luke 13:18 - 35

2010 June 28th for July 8th

Jesus tries to describe the kingdom of heaven to the crowds. He says it is like a mustard seed, a tiny seed that makes a large plant that birds can nest in. He says it is like yeast that leavens a large amount of dough.

It may be a nuance here that Jesus is using terms ordinarily associated with evil like yeast (leaven) and birds. (Or it may be misunderstanding.)

Someone asked him if only a few would be saved. His answer seems to directly contradict the philosophy of universal salvation.

“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’

“But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’

“Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’

“But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and the first will be last.”

... Or maybe he is just talking to the Jews where we Gentiles are the “others”, but it doesn’t seem like it.

Then some Pharisees came and warned him to get out of town because Herod was trying to kill him. Jesus replied,

“Go tell that fox, ‘I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal! In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day -- for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!’”

His goal, clear to us but not to them, is to die in Jerusalem and then rise on the third day.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Luke 14

2010 June 28th for July 9th

Jesus was tested by some Pharisees. He was set up in a house with a man who suffered from dropsy. It was the Sabbath and he was being watched closely to see what he would do, so he asked directly, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" No one said anything so he healed the man and sent him on his way. He then gave the classic parry, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" They gave no answer.

He noticed that the guests were fighting for the places of honor at the table. He told them to go for the lowest places so that the host could promote them. If they were at a high place and were demoted, it would be shameful. He also said not to just do favors for those who could repay. What count is that, just to break even? "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

He then told of a man who prepared a great banquet and invited many friends, but when the banquet was ready and he sent his servants to come, they all begged off for various reasons. This was infuriating, so the man had his servants go and get anyone they could find off the street to come to the dinner.

The culture here is that, in the absence of timekeeping beyond the locations of the sun, moon, and stars, no one was ever "on time." "On time" meant being responsive to social superiors on their schedule, thus the sending of servants out when the banquet was ready. It was scornful to reject the superior at that point.

At the end of the story the host is still angry with his friends who did not come. It is unclear what the meaning of this story is unless Jesus is, in fact, speaking to the Jews, the otherwise chosen people, directly about their rejection of God by not being ready when God is ready.

Jesus then taught on the cost of being his follower.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters -- yes, even his own life -- he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

In a society of strong family and inclusion, this was so radical as to be nearly incomprehensible. God, the superior with his own schedule, claims to be infinitely more important than anything else.

What if you were going to build a tower, or fight a battle? Wouldn't you estimate the cost first to see if you thought you could do it? If you couldn't wouldn't you take measures in advance to avoid catastrophe?

In an in-the-moment society, this idea of thinking in the future was also radical.

“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Luke 15

2010 June 28th for July 12th

In contrast to the rejection of all but a few who are found worthy for God’s kingdom in the last chapter, this chapter teaches of God’s concern for those who are lost but then are found or return. All three stories involve parties.

In one story, a shepherd has a hundred sheep but one is missing. He leaves the others behind and goes looking for the one who is lost. When he finds it there is great rejoicing.

In another story a woman has lost a coin, a day’s wages. She cleans house until it is found then throws a party for her friends celebrating that the misfortune is averted.

And then there is the story of the lost son that has so many layers of meaning and possible interpretations that a gigabyte could not contain them all.

A man had two sons. The youngest one asked for his inheritance saying in effect that he wished his father was already dead. The father complied and gave him his part of the estate. The son then left the region and lived a wild life in a foreign country.

After all of his resources were wasted in this way a famine came and he was worse than destitute. He had a job feeding pigs and was so hungry that he would like to have eaten the pig food but wasn’t allowed to. In despair he resolved to return to his father in the hopes of being hired on as a slave. At least his father’s slaves ate.

When he is still a long way from home, his father saw him and ran out to him and brought him back into the household with full honors. Then he threw the biggest party ever.

Meanwhile, the younger son’s older brother came in from working in the fields and wondered what all the commotion was about. He was angry and pointed out to his father that although he had worked there like a slave all those years, he had never even gotten to have a little party with his friends. Meanwhile this other son, after having wasted half of the estate got *this!*

The father’s reply tells us about God’s concern for the lost, regardless of the circumstances of their lostness.

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

All he had to do was to come back. No penance; no payment.

Luke 16

2010 June 29th for July 13th

Jesus told a story about a manager who was getting fired. Someone reported that he had been dishonest and his boss called him to account. While he was closing out his affairs, he ingratiated himself with all of his boss’s debtors by having them change their bills for goods and services to smaller amounts. In this way he hoped to have a place to stay after he was discharged.

Jesus summarizes: “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

But, lest you get the wrong idea, he also concludes:

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

And the famous, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

The Pharisees, who themselves loved money, sneered. Jesus retorted, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

Next, Jesus upholds the Law and extends the definition of adultery:

“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

This is the parable of the rich and the poor.

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

And so we see that this is the case. Jesus came back from death and not everyone believes him.

Is this the basis for our concept of hell or is this allegorical? Is the cosmic justice that those who are well off in this life where nothing is clear are punished eternally while those who were oppressed here are rewarded in eternity where everything is made plain?

Luke 17

2010 June 29th for July 14th

Jesus told the disciples to be careful. Things happen in the world that cause people to sin, but it will be bad for the person that the sinful things come through. “It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.”

The disciples begged for more faith. Jesus told them that if they had faith as little as a mustard seed, they could command a tree to uproot itself and it would.

Then he talked about servants and masters. If you had a servant who came in from working in the field for the day would you have him sit down and serve him his dinner? No, you would tell the servant to serve you first then eat later himself. Would anyone think highly of the servant for just doing what he was supposed to do? No. The servants would say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.”

This is where “can’t be good enough” comes from.

As they travelled towards Jerusalem, they were going along the boundary of Samaria. Ten lepers stood off at a distance and begged for mercy. Jesus called out to them and told them to go show themselves to the priests. They did this and were all found to be cleansed. One of them came back to thank Jesus, praising God as he went, and he was a Samaritan. Jesus said, “Were not all ten cleansed? where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

The disciples asked about the coming of the kingdom of God. Jesus told them not to be confused by what people said and predictions they made. “... the kingdom of God is within you.” That’s where it is. In the end times, people would predict or announce his coming, but don’t be fooled by them. Jesus had to “suffer many things and be rejected by this generation” first.

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot’s wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”

The disciples asked “Where, Lord.” By this I think they mean, “Taken to where?”

Jesus’ answer has always been cryptic to me: “Where there is a dead body there the vultures will gather.”

Perhaps they meant “where will all this happen” and the answer describes a battlefield after the battle.

Does he mean that to be “taken” means dying or being killed? That’s not the “rapture” of the literature....

Jesus taught that we should pray with persistence. He told a story about a widow who wanted justice and pestered the judge until she got it. The judge said, “Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!”

Jesus summarized this. “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.”

But, always frustrated with his generation, Jesus concludes, “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

To those in the religious establishment who looked down on everyone else, Jesus told a story of two men who went up to pray. One was very impressed with himself and announced all of his religious goodness to God in a loud voice so everyone could hear. The other, a tax collector, felt the full weight of his many sins and could only barely beg forgiveness in moans.

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

More upside-down-ness.

People brought babies for Jesus to touch and bless. The disciples rebuked them but Jesus invited them with the famous statement, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Luke 18:18 - 43

2010 June 30th for July 16th

A man asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to follow the commandments. The man replied that he had done this from his youth. One thing more was needed then, Jesus said, to sell everything, give the proceeds to the poor, and come follow him. The man, who was very rich, went away very sad.

Jesus said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

Everyone was surprised at this. They thought that wealth was a blessing from God indicating his favor.

The rich man was surprised too. This is surely one of those reality encounters that disturbs your whole day.

Who could be saved then, they asked? Jesus answered obliquely, indicating perhaps that no one could be saved except by a miracle, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

The disciples were now concerned. They had left everything to follow Jesus and what would they get for it? Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth; no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

More anti-family talk.

Jesus then told the disciples privately that they were pressing on to Jerusalem and that everything prophesied about the Son of Man would be fulfilled there: "They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

They had no idea what he was talking about.

As they got close to Jericho, a blind man called out from the side of the road and got Jesus' attention. Jesus asked what he wanted. He was blind and wanted to be able to see. Jesus said, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he could see and got up and followed Jesus. There was much rejoicing in the crowd.

Luke 19:1 - 27

2010 July 1st for 19th

A man named Zacchaeus lived in Jericho. He was a wealthy tax collector. He was also a short man, so he climbed a tree so he could get above the crowd and see Jesus passing by as he entered town.

When Jesus came to the tree he called up to Zacchaeus and told him that he had to come down because Jesus would be a guest in his house that day. Zacchaeus gladly complied.

At the party following, Zacchaeus announced that he had given half of his wealth to the poor and that if he had ever cheated anyone he would pay them back fourfold. Notice that he was being preemptory here. If he had asked Jesus what it took to be saved, as the rich guy did yesterday, Jesus might have said to sell *everything*, as he did yesterday. In this case, Jesus ruled this acceptable, saying, "Today salvation has come to his house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

The last sentence was in answer to all those who were grumbling that Jesus would have anything to do with such a big sinner in the first place. It also says that pre-repentant tax collectors are lost.

Jesus then continued by telling a story. "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return." Two things happened. First, he called in ten of his

servants and gave them each one mina (some amount of money) to work with while he was gone. Second, when he left town, “his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’” This brings to mind Senate confirmation hearings such as are conducted today.

So, as for the servants, when the man returned as their king, one of them reported that he had made ten minas on the one mina investment. The new king congratulated him and put him in charge of ten cities. One reported a return of five minas. He was put in charge of five cities. One, apparently from the opposition party, told the king that he was a tough guy to work for but that he had kept the mina safe anyway and returned it. The king was furious and lectured the servant for self-fulfilling his own statement that the king was a tough guy to work for. He asked him why he hadn’t just put it in the bank to at least make interest. He then had him thrown out and his mina given to the servant who already had ten.

This in itself was a surprise. Why give more to someone who already has the most? Once again, the answer is, “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.”

The servant with ten could clearly handle eleven.

The king then concludes his coronation business.

“But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them -- bring them here and kill them in front of me.”

So, after that ceremony, the king is going to have a harmonious, unified kingdom. Of fear.

This, among many others, is a puzzling piece of the story to me. Does the king represent the role of Jesus? Is this what happens in heaven?

Luke 19:28 - 48

2010 July 1st for 20th

As they approached Jerusalem, Jesus sent two disciples ahead to get a colt on which he would ride into the city. He told them where they would find it and said that if anyone asked them what they were doing, just to say, “The Lord needs it.” This all happened exactly as Jesus had instructed.

As Jesus rode into town on the colt, people threw their cloaks on the road in front of him and praised God saying,

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

The Pharisees, of course, demanded of Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

"I tell you," Jesus replied, "if they keep quiet the stones will cry out."

Jesus then lamented Jerusalem, weeping.

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace -- but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

When Jesus got to the temple, he ran off all of the buyers and sellers.

"It is written, my house will be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers."

He taught in the temple every day. The religious leaders kept trying to kill him. "Yet, they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words."

Luke 20:1 - 19

2010 July 1st for 21st

One thing the religious leaders tried was to challenge Jesus' authority. What authority, they asked, did Jesus possess to teach and act as he did? In reply, he asked them where John the Baptist's authority had come from. They couldn't answer for political reasons. If they said from heaven, then Jesus could ask them that they hadn't followed John. If they said from men, the crowds, who liked John and believed his authority was in fact from heaven, would be against them.

They decided not to answer and so Jesus also declined to answer.

Continuing his teaching in the temple, he told the story of the tenants in the vineyard. A man leased out a vineyard to some tenants and when it was time for the harvest he sent some servants to collect his share. The tenants killed the servants. The owner sent more servants and the tenants killed them too. The owner then sent his own son, thinking that the tenants would respect him but they did not, they killed him too. He was the heir, after all.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

The people were horrified by this and said, "May this never be!"

Jesus then said that this was the meaning of the Psalm (118),

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone.”

He also said, “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

Doesn't sound like much to hope for does it? Against Jesus, the heir, the capstone, one is either crushed or broken to pieces.

The religious leaders understood that this story allegorized them and they kept looking for a way to arrest Jesus, but were still afraid of the crowds.

Luke 20:20 - 47

2010 July 2nd for 22nd

In order to try to trick and discredit Jesus, various groups of experts came around with loaded questions. One group wondered innocently if it was legal to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus saw through this and, using a coin with a picture of Caesar on it as an example gave the famous, ‘render unto Caesar’ pronouncement. Observe your obligations to God and to the state.

Another group wondered about marriage in the resurrection. Really, they didn't believe in life after death and were just using the puzzle of eternal marriage as a lever. Jesus' response is interesting. It is not inclusive. It describes some of the conditions in “heaven.” It argues the point from the Law, not the Prophets (which the lawyers, the other group, respected less).

“The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

Maybe I'm looking too carefully here, but I note that only some are “considered worthy” of the resurrection age, but that “all are alive” to God. Maybe “all” refers to the patriarchs he has just listed.

Jesus then posed his own puzzle. Quoting a psalm in support, he asks, “How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David?” How can he be both son of and Lord over David?

Never finishing without a swipe at the lawyers, he concludes, “Beware of the teachers of the law. they like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour

widows houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”

The punishment is not specified here, but we did see Lazarus in heaven and the rich man burning in hell just the other day.

Luke 21

2010 July 2nd for 23rd

Jesus and the disciples were in the temple watching people give their offerings. One widow put in nearly nothing, just a couple of pennies, but Jesus held her up as an example. She had given everything she had leaving her nothing to live on. Others had given much more, but from even greater wealth.

The disciples were admiring the temple and grounds. Jesus pointed out to them that none of this would be left standing. They asked when this disaster would happen. Jesus gave a very long answer, reported here similarly to Matthew 24.

First, don't be deceived when claims are made that the end times are here. In the last 2000 years, we have noted that the end times have “always” been here for some very convincing reason or another (Napoleon, Hitler, the Black Plague, etc., and indeed, these things were the “end times” for many of the people.). Expect serious persecution and punishment on account of Jesus, but don't worry about the defense. It will be given by the Spirit in the moment of need and you would be taken care of.

When the siege comes, go and don't look back. It will be terrible for people like pregnant women and parents with small children. The whole creation, heavens and earth, will writhe in anguish. “At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Jesus then summarized with a parable about a fig tree. You can tell by their sprouts that summer is near. Similarly, you will know when the end is near. “This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

As in many parables before, he warned against not being ready. “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.” Always be ready so that “you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

Luke 22:1 - 38

2010 July 2nd for 26th

The Passover was approaching and still the religious establishment had not found a way to do anything about Jesus. Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, went to them and offered to betray Jesus for money. The authorities were delighted and agreed.

“Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.”

They asked for instructions. He told them to go into the city and follow a man carrying a jar who would lead them to a house where the owner had prepared a furnished upstairs room. They were to prepare the meal there.

At the Passover meal, Jesus said many things.

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

He served them the bread and the cup.

“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.”

We don't say the part about the betrayal in our communion services.

The disciples discussed among themselves who could do such a thing as the betrayal. Then they disputed among themselves which of them was the greatest. The new kingdom was at hand; it was time for the power plays! Again Jesus instructed about the upside-down kingdom.

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table of the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Jesus then addressed Peter. Satan had wanted to “sift [him] as wheat,” but Jesus had prevailed in prayer. “And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Turned back from what? Peter wondered. He would follow Jesus to the death! But Jesus told him that that very night Peter would deny him three times.

Then he said to them all, “When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?”

They said they had lacked nothing.

“But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”

The disciples, still clearly missing the point, said they had two sword, as if they were going to go fight some decisive battle.

Jesus replied, “That is enough.”

Later, Peter will use one of the two swords.

Luke 22:39 - 65

2010 July 16th for 27th

After supper, Jesus and the disciples went to the Mount of Olives to pray as was their custom. Jesus asked them to pray with him that they wouldn’t fall into temptation.

While they were doing this, Judas arrived leading a crowd. He approached Jesus to kiss him, to indicate that Jesus was the one to seize. Jesus said, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

The other disciples jumped into action with their swords. One of them cut off the ear of one of the servants. Jesus put a stop to this and healed the man’s ear.

This is how Jesus behaves in the heat of battle, healing the wounded enemies.

“Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?” Jesus said, “Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour -- when darkness reigns.”

They took him to the High Priest’s house. A woman recognized Peter as being one of the disciples, but he denied it. Shortly another woman did the same thing and he denied knowing Jesus again. About an hour later, someone else recognized his accent as Galilean and challenged him. Peter answered, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Then the rooster crowed and Jesus turned to look “straight at Peter” and Peter went out and wept bitterly.

The guards mocked Jesus, hitting him and beating him and taunting him to “prophecy” as to who was hitting him.

Luke 22:66 - 23:25

2010 July 16th for 28th

At daybreak Jesus was put on trial before the council. They first asked him if he was the Christ. He answered:

“If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”

So they asked him if he was the Son of God. He answered.

“You are right in saying I am.”

The term “I am” is the name of God. To even use the name was blasphemy, much less in self reference.

The verdict then was: “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.”

They then took Jesus to Pilate, the local Roman governor who had the authority to pronounce a death sentence. Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus said, “Yes, it is as you say.”

Pilate went out to the crowd and said that he had no basis for a charge against Jesus but the religious leadership accused him of stirring up rebellion and insurrection against the Romans and other things that were mostly exaggerated rumors and wishful thinking.

Herod, the figurehead king of the Jews was also in town so Pilate sent Jesus down to Herod who was delighted at the opportunity. Herod had wanted to see Jesus and maybe witness a miracle but no matter what they asked or said, Jesus did not speak at all, and he did nothing. All the while the religious leaders were there accusing him of everything they could think of. Herod and his officers got mad and started abusing Jesus themselves, then mocked him by dressing him up in a fine robe and sending him back to Pilate.

Pilate and Herod, who had up to now been enemies, became friends that day.

Pilate addressed the religious leaders. Neither he nor Herod had found any basis for charging Jesus, so he said he would release him. The religious leaders stirred up the crowd to ask for the release of a real insurrectionist and thief, Barabbas. They wanted Jesus crucified. Pilate, a third time, proposed to merely punish Jesus and release him, but the crowd insisted and they were getting out of control.

“So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.”

Luke 23:26 - 56

2010 July 16th for 29th

Jesus' death was by crucifixion. On the way to the hill where the crucifixion was to be carried out, a man named Simon who was visiting from Cyrene was pressed into service to help carry the cross. Women were following him wailing. He stopped to address them.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’” Then

“they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’
and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’”

“For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

The quote is from Isaiah. Jesus seems to be saying that things will get worse. Even worse than this.

He was crucified between two criminals. From the cross, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” The guards gambled for his clothing.

People watched. Some sneered. Some mocked. Some told him if he was so powerful that he should save himself. One of the criminals also “hurled insults at him” similarly, telling Jesus that he should save himself and them. The other criminal said, “Don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” He then spoke to Jesus kindly, as a suppliant, asking him to remember him when he was in his kingdom. Jesus replied,

“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Jesus was thus tempted to the very end.

And to the very end we see the two approaches to Jesus. One of trying to get him to wield power in self interest, and the other of supplication in desperation. Which is acceptable?

About noon the whole land went dark. About three in the afternoon the curtain in the temple was torn in two and Jesus cried out, “Father into your hands I commit my spirit.” Then he died.

The centurion in charge of the crucifixions praised God in fear saying, “surely this was a righteous man.” Some of the women who followed Jesus watched from a distance.

A righteous man named Joseph had a new tomb that had just been cut out of the rock and had never been used. He requested Jesus' body from Pilate and put it in this new tomb. Then the sun set and it was the Sabbath. Everyone then "rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."

Luke 24:1 - 35

2010 July 19th for 30th

The women took burial spices to the tomb early on Sunday morning after the Sabbath. When they arrived around dawn they found the one to three ton stone rolled away and the body of the Lord Jesus missing. Suddenly two men in gleaming robes appeared and told them that Jesus had risen. "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

They then remembered that he had said this.

The women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others went to the Eleven disciples and told them. The Eleven men heard all this as nonsense, coming from women, but Peter ran to the tomb to check it out anyway. "Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened."

The same day two disciples, Cleopas and another man, were on the way to Emmaus. Jesus came up and travelled with them but they didn't recognize him. Jesus asked them what they had been talking about. Cleopas asked him if he was the only person in Jerusalem who wasn't talking about the things that had happened.

"What things?" Jesus asked.

(Indeed, it seems that Jesus was the *only* person in Jerusalem who truly knew what had happened.)

So they told Jesus about Jesus of Nazareth. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

Jesus replied, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" Jesus then told them his whole story from Moses through the Prophets.

When they got to the village Jesus acted like he was going to go on, but they invited him to stay the night with them before continuing. When they were at the table for the evening meal he broke the bread and gave thanks and in that moment they recognized him. And he disappeared.

“They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’”

So they went back to Jerusalem immediately that night and reported to the Eleven what had happened. By now Peter had also seen him. The Eleven themselves were saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”

Luke 24:36 - 53

2010 July 19th for August 2nd

While the Eleven and the men from Emmaus and the other disciples were discussing having seen Jesus, he was there among them and they were terrified thinking they were seeing a ghost.

But they were not seeing a ghost. Jesus showed them his hands and feet which had been injured and had them touch them and ate a piece of fish. He then preached to them.

“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

After this he led them out to the Bethany area and lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he “was taken up into heaven.” They worshipped him, then returned to Jerusalem and spent all their time praising God in the temple.

Concluding Thoughts on Luke

2010 July 19th for August 3rd

Luke is the largest and most detailed account of the life and work of Jesus from the four Gospels that we have, yet, I am impressed by some of what is missing, that some of the case for various points of view has to be made from the other Gospels or other books. For instance, a case is made that Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the resurrected Jesus. The story in Luke does not contradict or rule out that case, but neither is it made explicit. The first people to talk to Jesus in the Luke version are a couple of disciples on the way to Emmaus, one of whose names is not even known. Luke has not tried to recount everything known with chronological precision, as we might today. He uses a different writing style appropriate to his times.

Another impression that I have is that the Jesus that has been taught to me, in various ways by various people, is inaccurate. There are hundreds of gradations but the two extreme examples are Jesus the shepherd who wouldn't hurt a fly and Jesus the Lord Almighty who will preside over final justice in the Final Judgement, i.e., where everyone and everything in this sorry, imperfect creation will be condemned and torched. There are those who preach that everything Jesus said, did, and thought was supernaturally perfect and complete. Others teach Jesus as a person growing into himself, just as everyone does, learning to do and doing the jobs that he must do, and without sin. Without sin does not here mean without error or iteration, it means without separation from God.

Others teach a Jesus who brings everyone to heaven; it is only that some people hate that because they don't like Jesus, so an eternity of that is like hell to them.

I suspect that all teaching is imperfect, being filtered through the beliefs and needs of the teacher, and their schools and modes of thought, no matter how well considered, developed, and/or inspired. And so it is with me as well.

Taking the text at face value, we see much that is in some level of conflict with all the teaching I have ever received. We see a Jesus who, once he goes to work as a prophet, leaves his family and his family role behind him decisively. He creates a new kingdom-of-God family that gets all the relational privilege. We see a Jesus who doesn't like a lot of individuals, particularly self-serving members of the religious establishment which he is, after all, uprooting. We see a Jesus who will turn to his closest friend and follower and say, "Get behind me Satan." We see a Jesus who, whenever he comes across an imperfection in the creation, a dead person, a broken or sick person, or a tree that doesn't bear fruit, someone who doesn't understand -- fixes it, and has the power to fix it, and never pulls a punch, every time. We see a Jesus who preaches repentance and the forgiveness of sins. We see a Jesus who brings division, not unity and peace, and he knows it and says so. We see a Jesus who believes in hell and is very clear that it will be occupied by some people, often those who are rich, powerful, and unrepentant now (and he doesn't say that it's just because they're in heaven and don't like him). Those who make themselves servants could be worthy, but it's going to basically take a miracle (which is possible with God) to get anyone into the kingdom of God.

I am also taught that all such confusion arises because this Jesus is not a subject matter to be taught but is a person to be known, that he picks me for this knowing, it is not even my initiative to pick him, that it is only my choice to accept or reject. What I am accepting or rejecting is not well spelled out by this explaining. It is better spelled out by Jesus himself. Keep the commandments. Leave everything, *everything* for the kingdom of God which is infinitely more important than anything. Put your treasure in heaven. Don't be a hypocrite or prey on those who are lesser. Keep *my* commandments, he says.

What motivates Jesus? Companionship? Correctness? His Father? What motivates his Father?

I find it helpful to understand motivations in order to know and accommodate those who I know. Face value of what they say is rarely complete, language being imperfect to the speaker and to the hearer. Even when Jesus is perfect, I and we, are not, though he shows little patience for our imperfections. Maybe it is hard to identify. How indeed does Jesus know us who are here when he is “here with us,” as the angels said? Even Jesus himself said while he was with them for the last time, “while I *was* with you.” He is no longer with them in body even while he says this in body. The suffering is past. The glory has come.

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