

# Luke Introduction

*Taught by Ellen DeWitt, Fall 2012*

1. Luke is the longest book in the New Testament.
2. Over 50% of Luke is unique, containing material not found anywhere else. For example, Luke mentions 13 women not found in the other gospels.
3. Luke has a more comprehensive range than the other gospels, beginning with the announcement of John the Baptist's birth and ending with Christ's ascension.
4. We have no idea of how many miracles Jesus performed while on earth, but 35 of them are detailed in the gospels, 20 of which are in Luke, and of that 20, 7 are unique to Luke alone.
5. There are 51 parables spoken by Christ (though the number is not fixed because there is much disagreement as to what constitutes a parable). However, of those 51 so classified, 35 are found in Luke, and 19 are unique to Luke.
6. There are 29 events in the life of Christ that are not included by any other gospel writer other than Luke.
7. Only Luke focuses on the artistic in recording the songs of Elizabeth, Mary, Zacharias, Simeon, and the angels.
8. Luke is unique in portraying intimate information about the thoughts and feelings of the people involved. For example, he wrote that *Mary treasured these things in her heart* (2:51).
9. Luke is aware that *many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us* (v. 1). Luke did not write because others failed to do so but rather because other accounts did not include things that he feels are essential. It's not that the other gospels are not accurate, but in supplying extra details, Luke is more accurate, such as the things surrounding the births of John the Baptist and Jesus.
10. Luke writes his gospel to a Gentile, making this gospel unique in its Gentile perspective.
11. Luke's sources are *those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word* (v. 2). These people would include Mary and the apostles (Acts 1:21-22; 2:32; 6:2, 4; Hebrews 2:3-4).
12. Luke begins where the Old Testament left off. Malachi 4:5-6 says, *Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers....* Luke wrote of the angel telling Zacharias, John's father, that *John is he who will go as a forerunner before Him [the Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of righteousness; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord* (Luke 1:17). So the events of Luke 1 break the 400 years of silence between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

## **An Introduction of Zacharias and Elizabeth — 1:5-7**

Two things which would have made them unacceptable to their contemporaries in Judaism:

1. They were obscure and insignificant. They came from a little-known town in the hills of Judea, not from more prominent towns, such as Jerusalem and Jericho. Zacharias was a priest, but not a well-known one. He served in the Temple by lot.
2. They were old and without children, a stigma especially felt by the women. When Elizabeth became pregnant, she said, “...*when He [the Lord] looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men*” (1:25).

Two things that would have made them acceptable to God:

1. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth were of the tribe/family of Aaron, making John of the priestly line, even though his function was as a prophet.
2. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth *were righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord* (1:6). Of course, their works did not “save” them, but it did demonstrate their devotion to God and obedience to His Law.

## **(1) The Angel Gabriel's Appearance and Announcement — 1:8-17**

There were many priests in that day, so the priestly duties were allocated according to the divisions of the priests, which King David created (1 Chronicles 24). When it was Abijah's division's turn (vv. 5, 8), Zacharias went to Jerusalem and *was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense* (v. 9). Imagine the awe that Zacharias must have felt as he, and he alone, entered the sacred temple, lit only by the lampstand.

Suddenly, he was not alone! *An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense* (v. 11), and *fear gripped him*.

1. The angel's first words were of comfort, *Do not be afraid*.
2. Then he told Zacharias his prayer had been heard—as priest, he would be praying for the coming of the Messiah, as would the people outside the Temple (v. 10).
  - Praying for a son at this particular moment would not be part of his priestly duties.
  - He probably had prayed that earlier, when they were younger, but now its fulfillment seemed impossible because of their old age (v. 18).
3. The prayer would be answered in such a way that Zacharias' own son would be the forerunner of the Messiah. He will actually have a part in announcing the Messiah's arrival, and turning the hearts of the people back to God, *so as to make ready a people for the Lord*, in fulfillment of Malachi 3:5-6).
4. This son *will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb* (v. 15).
5. He *will drink no wine or liquor*, probably because of charges such as Peter and the apostles received at Pentecost (Acts 2:13).
6. He would be named “John.”

## **A Request and a Rebuke — 1:18-23**

In spite of Zacharias' godliness, his obedience to the Law, and his lifetime of ministry, his faith was weak when it came to believing the promise from the angel. He asked the angel for a sign that the promise would be fulfilled. He himself ended up being the sign, as the angel struck Zacharias dumb.

When he came out of the Temple, he would obviously had to explain to the people, who *were wondering at his delay in the temple* (v. 21). What Zacharias could have announced with his tongue, God announced through his dumbness. The people *realized that he had seen a vision in the temple* (v. 22).

There are examples in the Old Testament of unusual births—Abraham and Sarah having a son in their old age, Hannah giving birth to Samuel, etc. But Zacharias was not asked to believe in the virgin birth, he was just to believe he and his wife would have a son in their old age.

In a rebuke of Zachariah's request, the angel said, "*I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.*" When Gabriel speaks, he speaks for God. To doubt Gabriel, is to doubt God Himself. Then we see that the angel is able, it seems to be on his own initiative, to strike Zacharias dumb. [As we'll see when we read about Jesus' ministry, demons (fallen angels) also struck people dumb. So angels, whether good or bad, have this supernatural power.]

*When the days of his priestly service were ended, that he went back home.* I don't know where I read it, but I think this service was a month long, but I don't know for sure. Notice the text says "*when the days...of his service*" whereas Elizabeth was in seclusion *five months*. So it was a short time, a month or less.

### **Elizabeth's Seclusion — 1:24-25**

*After these days, when they got home, Elizabeth his wife became pregnant.* Other than the fact that they were old (and we don't know how "old" they were) and the birth was prophesied, there is no other supernatural happening to this pregnancy. That is, it's not like Sarah, whom we know was 90 and was past child bearing years, so God had to create an egg and get her whole system running again. The priests served in the temple from ages 30 to 50 (Numbers 4), so they could be maybe close to 50, but still able to conceive, yet beyond what was the "normal" age for conception.

*She kept herself in seclusion for five months*—We don't know why. Maybe she wanted to make sure she didn't lose the baby in the early months of the pregnancy. Maybe she didn't want to have to speak for her husband, who was mute.

Elizabeth gives praise to God. "*This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men*" (v. 25). At this point, I'm sure Elizabeth thought this was the best news. However, as the events unfold, this is just the beginning. She will see the mother of Jesus, and she will name her child "John," in fulfillment of the angel's prophecy.

**Thoughts and Applications:** The contrasts are interesting: Zacharias was a man, Mary was a woman. Zacharias and his wife were older, Mary was young. Zacharias and Elizabeth were married, Mary was a virgin, engaged to be married. Zacharias doubted the angel's message, Mary believed.

### **(2) The Angel Gabriel's Appearance and Announcement — 1:26-38**

During Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, Gabriel appeared to Mary (read study book, p. 4).

Mary had a request for Gabriel, too, but it was not for a sign, as Zacharias' was, it was for clarification. Zacharias had wanted some kind of proof that he and his wife would have a child. But Mary wanted to know what she should do, to cooperate with the purposes of God as the angel announced them to her. She was asking "how" she would conceive, seeing she was a virgin. Zacharias' request came from a lack of faith. Mary's came from her faith.

The angel told Mary she didn't have to do anything. The conception would be the result of God's miraculous intervention.

As further encouragement, the angel told Mary that her *relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God* (v 36-37). So there was no angel or word from God for six months.

Mary's response is submission to God's will: *Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word* (v. 38).

*Now at this time Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth* (v. 39-40).

**Thoughts and Applications:** There are some things that we are curious about which Luke has not told us:

- Whether Mary is pregnant yet. When she arrived at Elizabeth's home, there is mention of John leaping in his mother's womb, but no mention of Mary's baby in her womb. Perhaps she became pregnant when at Elizabeth's, when she was away from Joseph and in Elizabeth's and Zacharias' care, as further testimony to the divine origin of Jesus.
- Whether or not Elizabeth and Mary had any previous communication before Mary's arrival. It seems, though, that there was no communication because Mary went with haste to Elizabeth's, with no time for communication beforehand (no cell phones or email 😊).
- Whether Mary was present when John was born. Luke says Mary returned home after 3 months (v. 56), which would be the time of John's birth. But we can't say for certainty either way, whether she witnessed the birth or not.

### **Elizabeth's Praise — 1:41-45**

1. Elizabeth seems to praise Mary before Mary can explain anything to her. As far as we know, Mary was not told that Elizabeth's son would be the forerunner of the Messiah (Mary's child). Mary probably would have wondered how Elizabeth would respond if she chose to tell her about the visit from the angel. If Mary had any hesitations, they vanished as soon as she entered the home and Elizabeth greeted her.
2. *Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.* The angel had told Zacharias that the child would be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb (v. 15), which seems to be the case when the *baby leaped in her womb* when Elizabeth saw Mary. But now we see Elizabeth herself is also filled with the Holy Spirit, and she quickly acknowledged the superior blessing given to Mary and rejoiced in it. This was a very similar attitude that John himself had, acknowledging the superiority of Christ (John 1:19-28).
3. Elizabeth's praise was not for her personal fulfillment in the bearing of a child but in the blessing given to her by the visit of Mary. Mary was the focus, not Elizabeth, the fruit of Mary's womb, not Elizabeth's.
4. Elizabeth must have been so encouraging to Mary. Instead of having to explain to Elizabeth about the birth of her Son, the Messiah, Elizabeth already knew. Therefore, Mary was totally free to share the details of the angel's revelation, without any hesitation. Elizabeth already rejoiced in the truth of God spoken through Gabriel.
5. Elizabeth praises God for much more than those things that Zacharias was told. Zacharias was only told that his own son would be the forerunner of the Messiah, but nothing of how or when the Messiah would come to earth. How did Elizabeth know these things? They were revealed in

the Scriptures, and obviously the Holy Spirit gave her understanding of it all, maybe at that very moment when she saw Mary.

6. Elizabeth's praise may suggest that she had greater spiritual insight than her husband did. The point being—a wife need not be restricted to the level of spirituality of her husband. Her public ministry is restricted (not formally teaching men), but as far as their spirituality and maturity is concerned, they can excel as much as they want to.

### **Mary's Magnificat — 1:46-55**

1. In verses 46-49, Mary does not see herself as better than anyone else. Rather, she sees herself as a sinner and rejoices *in God my Savior*. God has NOT chosen her because of her blessedness. Rather, He has blessed her as a result of God's grace (undeserved favor).
2. In verse 50, Mary goes from her personal blessing to the general blessing of God upon all those who fear Him in the future.
3. In verses 51-55, Mary focuses on the faithfulness of God to His promises and purposes, especially His covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Notice the past tense of the verbs. It's the history of Israel. It's what God has done.
4. The angel's words, however, are in the future tense: *He will be great, He will be called the Son of the Most High, God will give Him the throne of His father David, He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.*
5. Mary's praise does not focus on the child she will bear but on the Father who is sending His Messiah. In other words, she is not focusing on her baby but on Israel's history and how God's mercy has been shown over and over. God's past fulfillment of His promises gives assurance of His fulfillment of future promises.
6. Both the angel's message and Mary's psalm focus on the Messiah in terms of His glory, i.e., His Second Coming and reign as king. There doesn't seem to be even a hint at the purpose of His first coming to suffer and die.
7. It's interesting to contrast Mary's view with the view of the Pharisees. Mary did not mention the Law of Moses or the Mosaic Covenant (of works), but only God's promise to Abraham and the Abrahamic Covenant (of grace). Mary understood that Israel's hope was rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant, not the Mosaic. However, the Pharisees seemed to only think and talk in terms of the Mosaic Law, i.e. in terms of human works.

**Thoughts and Applications:** Mary provides us with a model of discipleship:

1. Her faith in the Word of God and in her submission to the will of God—*Behold,, the bondslave of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word*. While so many people (even Elizabeth) honor Mary as the mother of her Lord (v. 42, 48), Jesus Himself said that being obedient to God's will and His Word were more important than being humanly related to Him (see Mark 3:31-35; Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 1:45; 8:19-21; 11:27-28).
2. Her depth of her familiarity with the Word of God—not only did she think biblically, she also expressed herself in biblical terms in her magnificat.
3. Her grasp of God and her gratitude to God for bestowing mercy on her—not only is His mercy shown to her, but to *generation after generation toward those who fear Him*.
4. Her reflection and meditation on the things of God—in order to make the statements she made, she had to not only know but be thinking of the works of God. Later, Luke also records about Mary, she *...kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be* (1:29), and *His mother treasured all these things in her heart* (2:51).
5. Her praise of God was of benefit for her listener—it was done in the presence of Elizabeth, serving to encourage Elizabeth, as Elizabeth's praise encouraged Mary.

**A few other thoughts:** The restrictions the New Testament makes on women and their role in public worship are not detrimental to the spiritual life and development of women. It's interesting that Zacharias was a "professional" priest and male, and the angel came to him first, but his free will choice was doubtful. Both Mary and Elizabeth, though, as "lay" people and females, responded in faith and praise.

- Both Mary's and Elizabeth's praise of God went much further than just gratitude for the gift of a child. It began with their own experience but quickly moved to talking about God's character and His actions in the past, and His covenant promises. Too often our praise tends to focus on us and on our pleasant or pleasurable experiences.
- The miracle of the virgin birth was the starting point for Jesus' ministry and death and future reign as King. While the birth was awesome, we need to go beyond it. It's a similar thing to the new birth we all experience when we receive Christ as our Savior. It's an awesome thing, but we need to go beyond it. Our salvation comes about in the same way that Mary's baby was conceived—totally by the sovereign work of God, apart from any effort which Mary or we make. God does the work of producing life in us, just as He brought about life in Mary. But it's just the beginning of our life with God, a life that will last into eternity. Now *our ambition ... [needs to be] to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body ...* (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

### **Naming "John" — 1:57-80**

When the angel told Zacharias that he and his wife would have a son, the angel immediately told him *and you will give him the name John* (v. 13). It's not until verses 57-80 that we find this command to be a problem, with Elizabeth standing her ground against an unnamed group of people who are insisting that the boy be named after his father. It's interesting that only Luke records the births of John and Jesus, and he has chosen to spend several verses telling us of the name argument.

John wasn't named at his birth. He was named at his circumcision, which took place on the child's eighth day (v. 59). It doesn't say, but possibly this happened in their home. The "they" are *her neighbors and her relatives* (v. 58). Because Zacharias cannot speak, we don't know what he did during the ceremony, but it seems the people stepped up and probably assumed that the baby would be called Zacharias, after his father.

But Elizabeth interrupted, insisting that the boy's name was to be John. Since *there is no one among your relatives who is called by that name*, the people had a strong reaction to Elizabeth's demand. *They made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.* Her actions would have seemed inappropriate, as it seems the father was the one to name the child, but because he could not speak, Elizabeth interceded. Luke implies this was the right thing to do, and it showed her faith and obedience to what the angel had said. Obviously, Zacharias had communicated to Elizabeth sometime during her pregnancy that the angel said the boy was to be named John.

Zacharias got a tablet and wrote, "*His name is John.*" Naming the boy after his father implied that he would follow in his father's footsteps, being a priest. To be named different than the father implied that he would not learn to do what his father did. He would not be a priest. Which is exactly the case with John. So it was not so much the meaning of the word "John" itself, but what it implied because it was not his father's name.

And three things happened:

- (1) *And the people were all astonished—and fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard*

*them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him (v. 65-66). During his ministry, many thought John was the Messiah, which John kept insisting was not true (see 3:15-17).*

(2) *at once his [Zacharias’] mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and (3) he began to speak in praise of God (which Luke will write of in verses 67-79).*

### **Zacharias’ Praise — 1:67-69**

- Notice that the angel said John would be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb (v. 15), Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit when she saw Mary (v. 41), and now Zacharias is filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 67).
- Verses 68-75 emphasize the coming of the Messiah who will bring salvation from Israel’s enemies and mercy to Israel, *that we ... might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. This will be as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets* and according to the *oath which He swore to Abraham our father.*
- Verses 76-79 emphasize John. It re-states what the angel had said about John. He will *be called the prophet of the Most High* and he will *go on before the Lord to prepare His ways.*

### **Luke’s Conclusion — 1:80**

*And the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

- In less than 30 words, Luke summed up about 30 years of John’s life.
- He didn’t only grow physically, he became *strong in spirit*. He continued to be filled with the Holy Spirit, as he was while still in the womb.
- Both of these things were to prepare John for *his public appearance to Israel*.
- Both of these things happened in solitude, taking place *in the deserts*. His parents’ home was in the Judean Wilderness, which runs along the western side of the Dead Sea. The desert was his “back yard.” It also shows a separation from the religious priesthood, of which his father was a part. That separation helped him see the need of repentance, even by the religious leaders.
- John’s spiritual life did not begin when his ministry began. It began with the announcement of John’s birth. Knowledge of this allowed his parents to help teach and train him as a child.

**Thoughts and Applications:** Christians are called to be separate—from the world, from sin, even from our families if they are not in keeping with the Word of God. Christians are to be morally separate from those who do not belong to Christ. It may not be a physical separation, unless there cannot be a moral separation.

Also, John’s maturity to minister took time. Maturity does not come overnight. A person can make a spiritual decision soon after salvation (such as to read their Bible, or to stop a sinful behavior). But maturity takes time. *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore ... press on to maturity (Hebrews 5:11–6:1).* You can’t wake up in your 60s and want to be mature. However old you are right now, *press on to maturity*. It takes years ... it takes a lifetime.

# Luke 2:1-20

## The Setting

Between the accounts of the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus, some events occurred. Mary returned from Elizabeth's to her hometown of Nazareth, probably about 3 months' pregnant. The angel appeared to Joseph, informing him Mary was *with child by the Holy Spirit*, and that child was the Messiah. He then took Mary as his wife, but did not have sexual relations with her until after Jesus was born (Matthew 1:18-25).

## The Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem — 2:1-7

1. The decree for a census by the Roman government was probably (as is today) for the purpose of taxing the people. This census was not only inconvenient (imagine if today we had to all return to our hometowns!!!), but it was a reminder to Israel that they were not free. They were under the rule of a pagan power.
2. Why give us this information? Remember, the book is written to *most excellent Theophilus* (1:3). Three times Luke used the words *most excellent* (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25), each time in reference to a political official of high standing. So we assume it was the case with Theophilus, and, therefore, these details would be important to him. Also, other so-called "gods" of false religions have vague beginnings. But Jesus' birth was a real historical event in real time. Of most importance, though, prophecy in Micah 5:2 said the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem.

**Thoughts and Applications:** This demonstrates how God is in control of kings and kingdoms (Daniel 2:20-21). He caused Caesar to take this census, so Mary would have to go to Bethlehem where Jesus was to be born (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:4-6). And Joseph took them to Egypt to escape Herod (Matthew 2:15). Then He was raised in Nazareth (Matthew 2:23). So all three prophecies were fulfilled at the birth of Jesus. However, Theophilus, being a Gentile, would be more interested in the Roman political situation. Matthew, written to Jews, emphasizes the fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

3. *Joseph was of the house and family of David*—He was of royal descent, except Israel was under the "times of the Gentiles," where they did not have their own king, but foreign Gentile rulers. This rule was from the time of the Babylonian Captivity and will continue until Jesus comes again as King of Kings. Remember studying Ruth—Boaz lived in Bethlehem. He and Ruth had Obed, who had Jesse, who had David.
4. The trip to Bethlehem was about 75 miles. Nazareth was high on a cliff near the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. They'd go down to the Jezreel Valley and east, out to the Jordan River Valley. Take that about 60 miles south to Jericho, then climb 10 miles up into the hills (the New Testament "Good Samaritan" highway) to Jerusalem, then 5 miles south to Bethlehem. Imagine doing that when you are 9 months pregnant!!
5. We have no idea where they were staying. Mangers are feeding troughs, which are all over the place throughout the city. It's interesting that Christians in Israel make manger scenes with the "stable" as a cave in a hill, because wood is so scarce, but there are many caves in the area.

## The Angels and the Shepherds — 2:8-20

1. The shepherds were possibly taking care of sheep (Passover lambs) intended for offerings at the Temple in nearby Jerusalem. However, lamb is also a common meat for the Jews to eat.



2. All the people who were directly informed about the birth of the Messiah were godly people, so it seems like this would be true for the shepherds as well. The angel said to them, “*I bring you good news of great joy...*”
3. The contrast is interesting: the shepherds said, “*Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing ...*” *So they came in a hurry....* Compared to the religious leaders, who told Herod the prophecy of Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, when answering the questions of the magi, yet they never went and investigated it at all (Matthew 2:1-6).
4. The angel said this *good news of great joy* will be *for all the people*, not just the Jews.
5. Here we see Christ’s first and Second Coming proclaimed: *a Savior* who is *Christ* [Messiah], the coming King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
6. The shepherds didn’t ask for a sign, but being Jews, they liked signs (John 2:18, etc.). So the angels gave the shepherds a sign: *you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger*. This sign was not to convince the shepherds that the angels were telling the truth. Rather, from Matthew 2:16-18, we know there were other babies in Bethlehem, so the sign was for the purpose of identification. No other child would be found in a manger. This is the very thing that set this baby apart from all others and which would identify Him to the shepherds.

**Thoughts and Applications:** In His birth, Jesus identified with the shepherds. Jesus had no roof over His head, no house to dwell in. Neither did the shepherds. Jesus was poor and of no reputation, as were they. Jesus was called the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:14), identifying with them. He was lying in a manger, a feeding trough for the sheep. A beautiful picture of Christ’s humiliation and identification with men—the most humble of men (shepherds), who were rejected and despised (Genesis 43:32; 46:34).

7. The shepherds not only witnessed this historic event, and had opportunity to worship their King, but they also told others. They were the first witnesses of the Messiah’s birth.
8. Mary had been told by an angel that she, as a virgin, would give birth to the Messiah. And she was encouraged in this by Elizabeth. And the angel appeared to Joseph, preparing him for the event. But then we have some six months of pregnancy, with nothing happening. Then for them to have to travel to Bethlehem, when Mary was due, was a hardship. Then they have to put the baby in a feeding trough—I’m sure not the way they pictured the birth of the Messiah. How great it must have been for them when the shepherds came, such an affirmation to them that this was indeed the Messiah.
9. *But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart*, much as she did when the angel appeared to her in 1:29. Mary will continue to do this throughout Jesus’ life, as she does not expect that He will be killed.
10. The shepherds did not keep this a secret. *All who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds*. And the shepherds *went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen*. This is a day of good news. They cannot keep silent (see 2 Kings 7:9).
11. Very important words—*just as had been told them*. Fulfilled prophecy. Jesus said, “*... I am telling you before it comes to pass, so when it does occur, you may believe that I am He*” (John 13:19). That’s one of the purposes of prophecy, so when we see it is fulfilled, we will believe.

**Thoughts and Applications:**

1. We see the sovereignty of God in history. No mention of Old Testament fulfilled prophecy here, such as Micah 5:2, mentioned in Matthew. Theophilus, as a Gentile, would be impressed to learn that God is sovereign—even over Caesar, the highest Roman world power.
2. In communicating the Gospel to Theophilus, Luke emphasized what would be important to Theophilus. Paul said in Colossians 4:5-6, *Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders*,

*making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.* The Gospel itself never changes, but how we respond and present the Gospel should be with wisdom, making the most of the opportunity, seasoned with salt (so they ask for more), and appropriate for each person. What is appropriate for one person may not be appropriate for another.

3. All four gospel accounts spend chapters on the arrest, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But only Luke spends a few verses on His birth. It's important, but less important than His death, which saves us. But the world loves the story of the baby. It's less threatening. They put God in a box which makes Him comfortable to approach and think about, the kind of "god" they wish to serve, a "god" who is weak and helpless, who needs us, rather than a God who is sovereign and who demands our obedience and worship. Christ hanging on the cross is not a pretty picture. He is not one to whom we are drawn, who produces in us warm and fuzzy feelings.
4. The hardships we suffer in this life have God's purposes which we may not recognize, either here or in eternity. God is working out His plan. I'm pretty sure both Mary and Joseph had no idea that the hardships of traveling that distance, nine months pregnant, putting their baby in a manger were all things that were the sovereign hand of a loving God, to bring about His plan and to fulfill prophecy. Hardships are an opportunity to obey God and trust Him. *Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

# Luke 2:21-40

## The Setting

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It seems like the very night of His birth, the shepherds visit Him, lying in a manger. Eight days later, Jesus is circumcised and named Jesus. Seven plus 33 days Mary would be in her purification. Then they go to the Temple, to offer birds in sacrifice. At the Temple, Simeon and Anna came up to the Child and prophesy. Then sometime before Jesus was two, the magi from the east come to visit Him, bringing Him gifts. At this time, they are in a house, still in Bethlehem. An angel appears to Joseph, telling him to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt because Harod is about to kill all the babies in Bethlehem, attempting to also kill Jesus. After a while, they return home to Nazareth. Then when Jesus is 12 years old, they journey again to Jerusalem.

## The Ceremonies — 2:22-24

1. The circumcision—This probably happened where the family lived, rather than in the Temple. It occurred on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, as commanded by God to Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14), and as also commanded by the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12:3). Circumcision was a sign of the covenant made between God and His people, the Jews. It's also at this time that the baby was named "Jesus," as directed by the angel (Luke 1:31). This event was very similar to John the Baptist's (1:59-63).
2. *They brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord*—This was also in fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, that *Every first-born male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord* (Exodus 13:2). During the final plague in Egypt, when God slew the first-born of all Egyptian men and beasts, the Israelites who applied the blood of the Passover Lamb to their doorposts and lintels lived. The redemption of the first-born was required because the first-born were spared by God and thus belonged to Him. So when an Israelite family redeemed their first-born, they were acknowledging that this child belonged to God. The redemption price for a first-born male Israelite a month or more old was five (sanctuary) shekels (Numbers 18:16). Because this was when a baby was a month or more old, it could be done at the same time as the ceremony for the mother's purification.
3. Mary's purification—Again, a requirement of the Mosaic Law. Leviticus 12 says that a woman is ceremonially unclean after the birth of a child (as she is during menstruation). For the boy child, the woman is unclean for 7 days (v. 2) and unable to enter the sanctuary for another 33 days (v. 4). For a girl child, the time doubles (v. 5). This means that Jesus would have been approximately six weeks old at the time of His presentation. The sacrifice of *a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons* indicates that Mary and Joseph were poor people, as this was the provision for the poor (v. 6-8).

## The Psalm of Simeon — 2:25-35

- What we don't know about Simeon—He appeared out of nowhere. We don't know what tribe he is from, though he is an Israelite. We know nothing of his family, whether he was married or had any children. We know nothing of his occupation. It doesn't seem like he was a priest, because he came into the Temple at the direction of the Holy Spirit (v. 27).
- What we do know about Simeon—
  1. *He was righteous*—His character was one of integrity before man and God
  2. *He was devout*—He was a man of faith
  3. *He was looking for the consolation* [comfort, encouragement] *of Israel*—He was a man of hope, looking for the Messiah to come and restore Israel away from the Roman occupation

4. *The Holy Spirit was upon him*—In the Old Testament (and this time would still be the Old Testament), the Holy Spirit came and went on certain individuals for certain tasks. It is only in our age of grace that the Holy Spirit indwells each believer.
  5. *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ [Messiah]*
- *He came in the Spirit into the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into His arms, and blessed God*—We're not told how he would recognize Jesus (as the shepherds were told how to recognize Jesus). We're only told that this godly man recognized Jesus as the Messiah. It was obviously through the power of the Holy Spirit—as John leaped in Elizabeth's womb in the presence of Mary.
  - The presence of God left the Temple right before the Babylonian Captivity, as symbolized in the Ark of the Covenant disappearing at that time. The Israelites had brought idols into the Temple, and God was disgusted with them. He showed Ezekiel His presence leaving (Ezekiel 8–10). So for the past 400 years, the presence of God was missing from the Temple, but the religious system continued. At this moment, though, when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the Temple, the presence of God came back—though for just a few moments of time.
  - *Now Lord, Thou does let Thy bond-servant depart in peace, according to Thy word*—God had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Now Simeon realizes he holds the Messiah in his arms, so God has fulfilled His word to him.
  - In an amazing statement, Simeon says that Jesus is God's *salvation* for all peoples: *A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel*. This shows his knowledge of the Old Testament (Psalm 98:2-3; Isaiah 42:6-8; 52:10; 60:1-3). Another way to see this is that the revelation to the Gentiles could refer to our church age, and the glory of Israel refer to the Millennial Kingdom.
  - *And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him*. All those months of silence while Mary was pregnant, but now after Jesus' birth, there are the shepherds, the wise men, now Simeon, and Anna, all total strangers—yet all declaring Jesus as the Messiah.
  - Then *Simeon blessed them*. But he gives a prophecy only to Mary—perhaps indicating that Joseph would not see these coming events.
  - Up to now, it's been very positive concerning the Lord. He will be ruling on David's throne, setting things right, bringing salvation. But now, *Simeon said to Mary His mother*:
    1. *This Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel*—He will cause division
    2. *For a sign to be opposed*—He will be rejected
    3. *A sword will pierce even your own soul*—when Jesus is crucified, Mary herself will suffer grief
    4. *To the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed*—For example, when the Lord comes again, He will *both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts* (1 Corinthians 4:5).

### **The Announcement of Anna — 2:36-38**

Opposite of Simeon, we're told more of who she is and less about what she said.

1. She was an Israelite of the *tribe of Asher* and *daughter of Phanuel*. Asher was one of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom taken into captivity by Assyria. They did not return to the land, as Judah did after the Babylonian Captivity.
2. She was *advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four*. She's at least 84 years old.

3. She was a *prophetess*, ... *and she never left the Temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers*. Simeon had been guided by the Holy Spirit to go to the Temple. Anna apparently never left the Temple.
4. *At that very moment she came up*—evidently the moment that Simeon was making his prophecies about Jesus.
5. She *began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem* [from the Romans]. As a known prophetess, surely her words would have great impact, especially to those who were looking for the redemption, as she and Simeon were.

### Thoughts and Applications

1. This incident takes place in the Temple. It's His first appearance at the Temple. This fulfills the prophecy in Malachi 3—*And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His Temple...*
2. The reason Jesus was there at the Temple was for the ceremonies. Yet very little is said of them (no mention of the priests involved, or details of the ritual itself). The proclamation of Simeon and Anna seem to overshadow the ceremonies.
3. The primary purpose of Mary and Joseph was to fulfill the Law pertaining to Jesus. But the purpose of the passage was to identify Jesus as the Messiah. The Messiah had come!!
4. Simeon and Anna are described as godly people, in the midst of the religious “professionals” at the Temple. Yet, they are the ones to whom Jesus was presented. Not the priests. They were concerned about what really matters in life—righteousness, prayer, proclamation of Jesus.
5. Because Simeon had seen the Messiah, he was ready for death. So, too, as believers in Jesus, we are ready for death. It's trusting in Jesus, the Messiah, who brought salvation to all, Gentile and Jew, that gives us eternal hope.

### The Return to Nazareth — 2:39-40

- *When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord*—Jesus was born under the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. It was God's Law, and His parents did everything the Law required of them at the time of Jesus' birth.
- *They returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth*—they went back to the city they left maybe two years or so earlier (2:4). Mary was about nine months' pregnant when they left. They went to Bethlehem, had the baby, had a visit from the shepherds, went to the Temple for the birth ceremonies, had a visit from the wise men, fled to Egypt, and were now returning “home.” Matthew tells us in 2:19-23 that:
  1. *When Herod was dead* (after having the Bethlehem babies killed). He died in 4 B.C.
  2. *An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt*
  3. *Saying, “Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead.”*
  4. Joseph took Mary and Jesus back to Israel. *But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there* (to the Bethlehem and Jerusalem area in Judea). Archelaus was even more cruel than his father Herod (for example, he killed 3,000 Pharisees). He ruled from 4 B.C. to 6 A.D. Herod's other son Herod Antipas was ruler of Galilee from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D.
  5. *And being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, and came and resided in a city called Nazareth*
  6. *That what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”* We don't know of this prophecy. It must be an oral one, not written down.

- *The child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him*—We know He grew physically, but He was also growing mentally and spiritually.

## **The Visit to Jerusalem — 2:41-52**

- There is no other biblical record of the growing up years of Jesus. This is it.
  - The words of Jesus in this text are His first recorded words.
  - This is the last time Joseph is ever mentioned in the life of Jesus. It's commonly felt that Joseph must have died sometime after this incident and before Jesus began His public ministry.
  - The actions of Jesus, in the minds of His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, appeared to be wrong. If it was any other 12-year-old, we might also conclude that. But His actions were not wrong for Him.
1. Mary and Joseph went every year to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. When Jesus became 12, He went with them. There is no indication as to whether this was His first time or not. There is no mention of their younger children (Matthew 13:55-56), so as the oldest, this may have been His first trip there. Going to the Feast of the Passover was part of the Mosaic Law. (Some commentators say the year before a boy turned 13, he went to Jerusalem to prepare for his upcoming Bar Mitzvah. However, I absolutely do not believe that Jesus participated in the Bar Mitzvah, which is part of rabbinical Judaism, a cult off from the Mosaic Law. He would not participate in the very thing He so harshly condemned later in His ministry.)
  2. After the days of the Feast, the parents left for Nazareth with a caravan of *relatives and acquaintances*. They *supposed Him to be in the caravan*, but Jesus had *stayed behind in Jerusalem*. However, *His parents were unaware of it*. Obviously, because they looked for Him among the other travelers, it was a big group of people, probably with children going in and out among the people.
  3. They *went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him*. I'm sure, by this time in Jesus' life, they found Him to be a very trustworthy child, which is why they weren't worried at first.
  4. But not finding Jesus in the caravan, they returned to Jerusalem. They searched in the city for three days. Finally, they *found Him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers*.
  5. His parents have the day of travel out, and a day of travel back to Jerusalem, then 3 days of searching—they've missed Jesus for at least 5 days. All the concern, anxiety, and intensity caused by His absence now turns to frustration and anger. His mother scolds Jesus, right in front of those at the Temple. "*Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.*"
  6. Jesus' answer shifts the focus from His error to their error. In response to her rebuke, Jesus has a rebuke in His own question. "*Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?*" Seeing Mary brought up "Your father," meaning Joseph, Jesus reminds her of He was in His Father's house, just where the Son should have been.
  7. *They did not understand the statement which He had made to them*. It's been 12 years since the events of Jesus' birth. Perhaps those events had faded in their minds as the days and years passed by. But this event surely would have reminded them. As we've seen before with Mary, she *treasured all these things in her heart* until the day she would finally understand them.
  8. The event was quickly over. Jesus went down out of the Jerusalem mountains with them, back to Nazareth. And *He continued in subjection to them*, though it was probably never quite the same after that.

9. And He *kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men* for the next about 18 years. He was preparing for the day of His public appearance as Israel's Messiah.

### Thoughts and Applications

Why did Jesus stay behind in Jerusalem?

1. To learn about God. In His humanity, Jesus was *increasing in wisdom*, as well as *in stature*. He was sitting *in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions*. Learning from the Word of God.
2. To learn from the teachers at the Temple those things which His parents could not teach Him. As parents, we should be the primary teachers, but it's good for children to hear and learn about God from other believers (of course, make sure these others are truly believers and not false teachers). Also, this was the time of Passover, when Jesus would be crucified years later, so He would be particularly interested in learning about it.
3. Because most likely He would not have been given permission to stay there. What would Mary and Joseph have said if He had asked them, "Can I stay on in Jerusalem for a few days to discuss the Old Testament and theology with the teachers of Israel?"
4. From the parents' perspective, Jesus was a young boy—too young to make such decisions, too young to stay by Himself in Jerusalem, too young to discuss the Scriptures with the teachers in the Temple. However, He was God incarnate. God did not need to have man's permission to act any way He saw fit, nor was it required of God to explain His actions to man. God is even free to do those things that cause men pain and anxiety. Jesus could act as He did and not be wrong for doing so. Jesus, unlike any other 12-year-old in history, was God.

Why did Luke record only this event in the childhood of Jesus?

1. Luke emphasized both the deity and the humanity of Jesus. As a human, Jesus was born, and when a child, He grew and developed as any normal child would—physically, intellectually, and spiritually. He stayed at the Temple to learn, not teach, though *all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers*. That Jesus was God is also evident. The wisdom of Jesus is contrasted with the ignorance of His parents in their inability to grasp who He was and why He acted as He did, even with the revelation about Him that they had been previously given. Luke intended to represent Jesus as the God-man, even as a 12-year-old child.
2. In His perfect humanity, Jesus still grew physically, mentally, and spiritually. Jesus did not come to earth and immediately begin to minister. The event at the Temple occurred after 12 years of growth, and His public ministry required another 18 years of growth. If it was necessary for God incarnate to grow and mature, in preparation for His ministry, why is it that so many today want instant spirituality, instant maturity? Some people think some spectacular spiritual experience is the key to instant spiritual maturity and service. There was no instant growth or maturity for Jesus, neither should we expect it. Even God did not hurry to maturity.
3. Jesus did what He did because He was God, and as God, He was sovereign. His sovereignty entitled Him to do that which His parents did not approve of. It entitled Him to rebuke them for their lack of faith and understanding. (Why did they look all over town? Why did it seem like the Temple was the last place they looked for Him?) His sovereignty also entitled Him to do that which inconvenienced them and caused them much distress.
4. As sovereign God, Jesus' authority surpassed the parental authority of Mary and Joseph, which they *did not understand*. Jesus' first and primary obedience was to God the Father. *Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?* Their authority was vastly out-

ranked by the 12 year old child God had temporarily placed in their custody. Mary would not have permitted this “son” of hers to go to the cross either, but this He must do, in obedience to His true Father.

Whenever we question the working of God in our lives, we reveal that we have reversed the divine chain of authority. We act as though God were to be in submission to our will, rather than to acknowledge that it is we who must submit to His will, even if that brings pain, or inconvenience, or if we cannot understand what He is doing or why. The sovereignty of God means that God may act as He chooses, without having to explain His actions to man or to ask our permission.

### **Applications**

1. Ultimate obedience must be to God and not to any earthly authority, when the two conflict. *We must obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29). As parents, we need to realize that God is working in our children’s lives, in a way that may be painful and even costly to us.
2. Nothing should hinder us from access to those things which contribute to our spiritual growth. It’s evident that being at the Temple and having the opportunity to ask questions of the teachers was essential to the growth of Jesus. This was so important to Him that He found it necessary to act contrary to the wishes of His parents. If Jesus’ growth was so important to Him, shouldn’t our spiritual growth be as important to us? Spending time in God’s Word and prayer?
3. Mary and Joseph struggled with how to put Jesus’ deity together with His humanity. It’s the struggle we all have. Usually one is sacrificed for the other. Both are 100% true. Both God’s sovereignty and human free will responsibility are 100% true. Don’t trump one over the other. Yes, it’s a struggle!
4. “Who is Jesus Christ?” This question follows Jesus’ earthly ministry and right down to our own time. The answer to this question will establish authority in your life. It will rearrange your priorities and values. The answer to the identity of Christ also determines your identity, whether you are of your father, the devil (John 8:31-47) or whether your Father is the God of the universe (Romans 8:12-17).



# Luke 3

## The Setting — 3:1-2

Luke starts chapter 3 as he started chapter 2, rooted in the Gentile political history (important to Theophilus): *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene*—as well as the Jewish religious history: *in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas*. [see study book] Some of these same men will take part in Christ's crucifixion.

Though Luke introduced this section with the Gentile and religious leaders, it is clear that the message of John the Baptist was not through them or to them. John's ministry was to the common people.

## John the Baptist — 3:3-20

1. John was a unique man. What he ate was unique—*locusts and wild honey*; and how he dressed was unique—*clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist*. Where he came from was unique—he *appeared in the wilderness preaching*, rather than coming from the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem (though as a son of a priest, he could certainly have done that) or from the rabbis in the synagogues.
2. John's message was unique—*preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (Luke 3:3). The Jews were "in the covenant" by birth, they saw no need for anything else. But John said, *do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham* (v. 8). Being a Jew wasn't enough. They needed to repent, turn back to God. A Jew who didn't follow God was nothing.
3. John was the last prophet of the age of the Mosaic Law. Jesus said, "*The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John* (Luke 16:16). John's one ministry as a prophet was to call Israel to repentance and to keeping the Law—it was a failure, as all other prophets had failed (Matthew 23:29-39; Acts 7:52). It was with John's ministry that the preaching of the Law of the old covenant ceased. From this point on, the New Covenant will be preached (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

John's ministry should thus have demonstrated, once and for all, that the blessing of Israel, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, would never be achieved through the Mosaic Covenant, through the law-keeping of the nation Israel. Justification and blessing would only come by faith in the suffering, death, atonement, and resurrection of God's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

John's ministry was to close, once and for all, that chapter in Israel's history of the Mosaic Covenant, of law-keeping. No one had ever been saved by law-keeping, and neither would the kingdom of God ever be initiated because of it. Grace must replace law, the suffering of Messiah would provide a means of forgiveness and escape from the judgment of God. John's ministry was intended to point this out, in a final and definitive way. John not only proclaimed, one final time, a call to repentance and law-keeping, but introduced the One through whom the law would be fulfilled, and through whom salvation and forgiveness would be accomplished. What a privilege for John to end the one dispensation, and to introduce the other. (Deffinbaugh)

4. Luke was writing to a predominantly Gentile audience. In particular, Luke wrote to Theophilus (1:3). The question which a Gentile would want answered would be: “How can a Jewish Messiah, fulfilling Jewish prophecies and promises, bring salvation to Gentiles?” Luke’s answer, supported by the ministry of John the Baptist, was this: The Jewish system of law-keeping failed. It could not save Jews, nor can it save you. Thus, both Jews and Gentiles must be saved another way—through Christ. This is precisely the apostolic answer of Peter, which Luke recorded in the book of Acts: *Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke [keeping the Mosaic Law] which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are* (Acts 15:10-11).
5. John was a popular and powerful preacher. *The crowds who were going out to be baptized by him* (Luke 3:7). *All the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River...* (Mark 1:5). However, John performed no miracles (John 10:41). People were drawn to him by his message of the hope of the coming of the kingdom. As in the Old Testament, the people thought if they repented and turned back to God, then God would deliver Israel from its enemies, the Romans.
6. John was very much aware of the sinfulness of his society. *Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done* (Luke 3:19). John was also able to identify the sins which most characterized the tax-gatherers (*Collect no more than what you have been ordered to—v. 13*) and of the soldiers as well (*Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages* (v. 14).
7. John had a message of judgment. Again, similar to the prophets of the Old Testament. The people’s hearts were far from God. They needed to return to God (repent) or judgment would come. *Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance...Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire* (v. 8-9). As per the Mosaic Covenant: obedience brought blessing, disobedience brought cursing (judgment). John’s message was consistent with the Mosaic Covenant. But *God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him* (John 3:17). John had glimpses of this when he said of Jesus: *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29). With John’s own arrest, he began to question his own ministry and that of the Messiah. Jesus’ ministry was not of judgment but of salvation. The failure of the Jews to keep the Law opened the door for God’s grace to provide a better way, the way of salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. We’ll talk more of this in chapter 7.
8. John was a man of prayer. The disciples of Jesus, some of whom had been John’s disciples previously, asked Jesus, *“Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples”* (Luke 11:1).
9. John was a man of humility. *Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire* (Luke 3:15-16). He also said of Jesus, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:30).

## Thoughts and Applications

- “John was a man who dared to be different, to stand apart and alone. He was a man who was not held captive by those sins which were characteristic of his day. In order to speak as boldly as he did, his life was even more rigorously guarded against any appearance of evil. Here was a man whose life was as powerful as his words.” It’s an example to us—I often hear Christians say they feel “alone” in the world. I think that’s what many, of not most, of the believers throughout history thought. John guarded his life carefully, that there would not be even any appearance of evil.
- Even though John’s message was replaced by the message of grace, his boldness is an example to us. He called sin sin. He told of the coming judgment of God. These messages are just as true today.
- What a beautiful example of ministry we see in John. He said, “*He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So **this joy of mine has been made full***” (John 3:29). He was content to have played a role in turning men to Christ, of having men follow Christ and not himself. He was willing to be an instrument, and then to allow his ministry to pass away. How few ministries there are today which are joyfully allowed to die, having fulfilled their role.
- John had the exact attitude we should all have as believers: *Jesus must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all* (John 3:30-31).

## The Baptism of Jesus — 3:21-22

*Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”* John 1:29-34 tells us, *I [John the Baptist] did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’* That’s how John knew that Jesus was the Messiah. His next words were, *“I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”*

**Thoughts and Applications:** Why did Jesus get baptized? There’s no biblical record of baptisms being done up to this point. Baptism means “identification with.” Those who were baptized by John were identifying with John’s message. Jesus was, too. Today, when we are baptized, we are identifying with the message of Jesus and the cross.

## Jesus Begins His Ministry — 3:23

*When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age.* Being baptized by John seems to be the beginning point of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus, of course, lived during the age of the Mosaic Law, which was John’s message of repentance (in the case of sinful man) and turning back to God. Jesus did not need to repent, but He certainly identified with that message. With His death, though, He would end the Law and initiate the Age of Grace.

## The Genealogy of Jesus — 3:23-38

See the notes in the study book, pages 8-9.

# Luke 4

## The Temptation of Jesus — 4:1-13

The greatest and most dangerous form of temptation is that which entices us to do what is ultimately devastating and destructive, as though we were doing what was right. That which Satan used to tempt Jesus was not represented as evil, but as good (see 2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

The fall of man has clouded our ability to distinguish evil from good. Sin and Satan do not make sin readily apparent as much as they dull our perception of sin. In our society today, we are bombarded with the media tempting us to buy something. We almost expect to be tempted. Consequently, temptation is so common we often do not even recognize it.

### What Is Temptation?

1. Jesus identified Satan as the source of His temptation. No temptation comes from God (James 1:13). Whatever comes from Satan, his demons, or those in the world who are under his control has got to be sinful. So consider the source of the offer.
2. Temptation is anything that seeks to divert us from what is God's Word and His will for us. Even believers can tempt other believers (such as Peter rebuking Jesus in Matthew 16:23—Peter was a mouthpiece for Satan, and was addressed by Jesus as such). All three of Satan's temptations were diversions from the Messiah's calling and ministry.
3. Temptation may prompt an action which has the appearance of godliness and may even seem to have a biblical basis, even using biblical terminology, such as Satan's final temptation seemed.
4. Temptation appeals to us to satisfy a need or desire but in a way that is displeasing to God. Satan appealed to Jesus' hunger, hoping to satisfy it in a way that would be sinful.
5. Temptation is an appeal to act independently of God and to pursue self-interest above God's will. Commanding the stone to become bread would have been for Jesus to act for the purpose of satisfying His own needs, independently of God.
6. Temptation often motivates disobedience by creating a doubt about God's goodness or power, prompting us to act in our own behalf. Satan said to Eve, "Has God said...," creating doubt.
7. Temptation is an enticement to pursue God's will but by motives or means that are inconsistent with His will. The end does not justify the means! Satan wanted Jesus to establish His kingdom by worshipping Satan rather than by worshipping and obeying God.
8. Temptation always seems to offer a big prize for a small price [only \$19.95!]. He offered Jesus the whole kingdom, just for bowing the knee to Satan. But there is always a high, hidden cost. Temptation offers future rewards now and trades the future for the present, pleasure for pain, the seen for the unseen [the chocolate chip cookie vs. "losing weight"].
9. Temptation thrives on falsehood, deception, and evasion. It is very selective about the facts it reveals, and usually lies about the facts. Temptation tells us what we want to hear, not what we need to hear. Therefore, it minimizes the consequences of an evil act and maximizes the benefits.
10. Temptation wants you to act immediately, without prayer or wise counsel. Every temptation Satan made to Jesus was to act now—make bread **now**, have the kingdom **now**, jump from the pinnacle **now**. Satan doesn't want to give you time to think.
11. Temptation usually appeals to our lower motives and instincts. It appeals to our greed and lusts. After 40 days of no food, Jesus *became hungry*. Therefore, the temptation was to make food.
12. Temptation appeals to those who feel the need to prove themselves. All three of Satan's temptations were a challenge for Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God. He said to Jesus, "*If You are the Son of God...*" Of course, Jesus didn't need to prove that, but Satan thought he could tempt Jesus to do it.

## Christ's Temptations as a Human

1. *Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted** (Hebrews 2:14-18).*

  - In His temptations, Jesus identified with humanity. He chose to use none of His deity powers but to come through the temptations victorious, using the same resources which are available to every child of God—God's Word and the Holy Spirit.
  - Notice that resisting temptation results in suffering. It's not easy.
  - Jesus, therefore, knows exactly what we are going through when we are tempted. He can come to our aid. We need to pray. *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we **are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

2. *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but **One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.** Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).*
3. *In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, **He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.** And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:7-9).*
  - By its very definition, obedience is to do something you don't want to do. When you obey and say "no" to temptation, you will suffer. But that's how you learn obedience. Prof. Hendricks once said that he practices denying himself every day so he'll know what it feels like, so when a big temptation comes along, he'll not be blindsided by the suffering.

## Thoughts and Applications

1. It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted and was without sin. It's what we do with the temptation that can become sin.
2. No temptation is beyond our ability to resist. Paul said, *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it* (1 Corinthians 10:13).
  - Your temptation is not unique. It is common to man.
  - You will not be tempted beyond what you are able to resist.
  - The way of escape seems to be to endure it. If you give in to it, you have not escaped.
3. No temptation is permanently overcome, never again to occur or to appeal to us. Luke 4:13 says the devil *departed from Him until an opportune time*.
4. One thing we can do is encourage each other to obedience. *Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, ...admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted,*

*help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people (1 Thessalonians 5:11-15).*

5. Jesus dealt with temptation positively, rather than negatively. Satan always seems to be trying to cause us to think negatively—what we can't do—rather than what God has given us freedom to do. Every offer that Satan gave Jesus, He declined because He was pursuing a higher, positive good. He did not think of His hunger, He thought of obeying the Word of God.

### **Some Practical Suggestions for Resisting Temptations**

1. Ask who or what is the source of the offer. Can you trust the tempter? What do they have to gain?
2. Ask what the long-term consequences are. Will you get immediate pleasure or benefit but at the cost of long-term benefits? Does the benefit endure, or does it quickly pass?
3. To what motive or desire does the offer appeal?
4. How does the proposed action square with God's Word? Is there a biblical prohibition which forbids it? Is there a biblical imperative which commands it? Is it a matter of personal freedom or liberty?
5. How does the proposal square with my goals and calling in life (as a wife, as a mother, etc.)? With my priorities? With my values?
6. How will the proposal impact my walk with God? Will it draw me closer to God? Will it cause me to be more dependent on Him? Will it strengthen my faith?
7. What will it cost? What will the real, bottom-line cost be? What are the hidden costs? Who will pay the cost? Is the proposal one in which I gain at the expense of others, or one in which others gain at my expense (the biblical ideal)?
8. Am I being hurried to act quickly, rather than to think the matter through carefully? Will the "deal" really not be available in the future? Why not?
9. How much scrutiny and investigation is encouraged and/or allowed? Does the solicitor want me to check out the offer, or to act quickly?
10. Am I considering this proposition because I feel that I need to prove something to someone?

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Between verses 13 and 14, there is the first year of Jesus' public ministry, recorded in John 1:19–4:54. See the study book for overview of this time period.

Verses 14-15—*And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.*

- Jesus had been in Jerusalem and returned to Galilee through the middle of the hill country of the Samaritans.
- His teaching ministry in the synagogues is emphasized, where Jews gathered to read Scriptures and hear teaching. Not that Jesus approved of the synagogues, but He did use them.
- As a result, He was well-known and praised by the people.

## Jesus in His Hometown of Nazareth — 4:14-30

“In the worship of the synagogues, which since the restoration from Babylonian captivity...there were three persons who participated: the reader, the interpreter, and the expounder or preacher. On the sabbath and certain festive occasions there were several readers. Two lessons were read: one the *parashah* was from the Law and the other called the *haphtorah* from the prophets. Two prayers preceded the first reading. When the selection from the Law had been read, Jesus, invited by the chief of the ten leading elders, took His place to read the lesson from the prophets. The Chazzan, or school-master clerk of the synagogue, took from the ark of painted wood the roll of the prophet Isaiah, and handed it to Him. In the chief seats before Him were the ten leading elders, and behind them ranged the congregation, the men on one side and the women on the other of a lattice division in the middle of the synagogue.” (*bible.org*)

Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1 and Isaiah 58:6. He stopped reading before the phrase *and the day of vengeance of our God*. In doing so, Jesus separated His first coming to *preach the Gospel* from His Second Coming, *the day of vengeance*. Jesus, in His first coming, did not come to judge or condemn but to save (John 3:17).

*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*—Jesus was thus claiming to be the Messiah.

The people’s response:

- *Speaking well of Him*—they liked the words *release to captives ... recovery of sight to the blind...*
- *Wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips*—they didn’t know exactly what the words meant
- *Saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”*, i.e., from their very own town, grown up there. He would be their very own hero.

Jesus’ response (knowing what they were thinking): *No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’* A doctor would be expected to heal himself. One who was to bring blessing and prosperity to Israel (*to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord*), should have looked and acted prosperous himself—and bring prosperity to his home town.

*“Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your home town as well.”* They want Jesus to prove Himself by doing miracles in Nazareth, as He had done in Capernaum.

But Jesus said, *Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his home town*. No true prophet is honored in his own country, by his own people. So if they understand that Jesus is a true prophet, He would not be warmly received by the people in His home town. But if Jesus was a Messiah bringing prosperity, like the people supposed, who wanted Him to do miracles like He did in Capernaum, they would welcome Him. So Jesus did no miracles there. If they understood His ministry correctly, He would be rejected like all the other prophets to Israel (see 1 Kings 19:10; Jeremiah 35:15; 44:4-5; Acts 7:52).

Jesus illustrated this by showing that the prophets were received by Gentiles, and that the Gentiles received blessings at the prophets’ hands:

- During the famine in Israel for 3½ years, Elijah was not sent to a widow in Israel but to one in Sidon, a Gentile country. She fed him, and neither her oil nor the flour ran out the whole time (1 Kings 17:1-16).

- Naaman, captain of the army of Syria, was a leper. Elisha told him to dip seven times in the Jordan River, and he was healed (2 Kings 5:1-14). There were many lepers in Israel at the time, but only Naaman, a Gentile, was healed.

These prophets were sent to Israel to condemn their sin and pronounce God's judgment but were rejected by the Jews.

Jesus refused to fulfill their expectations because they were based on a false view of Scriptures and what the Messiah and His ministry would be. The true prophet, as well as the Messiah, would not bring blessing exclusively to the Jews, but to the Gentiles also. This message resulted in they *were filled with rage as they heard these things*.

Jesus offended them with the truth, and their sin was exposed. But why did Luke record this Gentile issue?

1. Beginning with the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12, God promised blessing to all the nations. And many of the prophets referred to this.
2. The Jews had great pride which gave them (even today) a monopoly on God's blessings. But as John the Baptist preached, *You say... "We have Abraham for our father"; for I [John] say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham* (Matthew 3:9). These people even thought they had a special "in" with the Messiah because He was from Nazareth (*"Is this not Joseph's son?"*). But Jesus was including the Gentiles.

The Law did not bring a Jew closer to God. The Law was a high standard which no one, including Jews, could keep. In the early church, the common thinking was that the Gentiles had to come to Christ through the "Jewish gate," i.e., become a Jewish proselyte, by being circumcised and keeping the Law (something they themselves could not do!!). But Jesus is the only door to salvation. The works of the Law must be set aside just as much as the heathen practices and beliefs of the Gentiles must be left behind. The Jews were proud and self-righteous, not lost and unclean like the Gentiles. We can see that by the intensity of their reaction to Jesus: *filled with rage*.

3. Luke's gospel is written primarily to and for Gentiles. The Gentile might ask: How can a Jewish Messiah, dying in fulfillment of Jewish Scriptures, obtain salvation for a Gentile? This is the answer: the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews made it possible for the Gentiles to be saved. This incident showed how strongly the Jews felt about keeping the Gentiles from receiving God's blessings.

So to recap: Jesus came to His hometown. They liked His message, and expected miracles as He did in Capernaum. But Jesus refused to do miracles because it would give them the wrong understanding of what His message was. Instead, He made it clear He would be rejected by the Jews, and the Gospel would go to the Gentiles. The result was rage, and they tried to kill Him (isn't that what I just said?!?!)

Nazareth is a town at the top of a cliff, rising over 1000 feet above the Jezreel Valley, on the north side of the valley. It is about 16 miles west of the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. The people from the synagogue *cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff*.



*But passing through their midst, He went His way.* It's like the parting of the Red Sea when Moses and the Israelites crossed through. The crowd parted to allow Jesus to pass through their midst, unharmed, untouched. This was the one and only miracle which they would witness.

### **Thoughts and Applications—**

1. How do we tell the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet? False prophets (and false teachers) are more popular than true prophets. False prophets tell people what they **want** to hear, but true prophets speak the unpleasant truths from God's Word which people **need** to hear. False prophets justify sin rather than condemn it. *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth* (2 Timothy 4:3-4).
2. We should be encouraged to share our faith, realizing that people do not naturally accept the things of God but rather reject them. Witnessing will not save people, but it will often make them mad. Only the working of the Spirit saves people.
3. Witnessing at "home" will be more difficult than witnessing to strangers in other places.
4. The people of Nazareth appealed to Jesus' sense of patriotism, to His Jewishness, to His "home town." As believers, our ultimate allegiance is to heaven. "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passin' through." When we become too attached to our country or our city (or our home/family), we may find our obligation to God being overshadowed (like Jonah did).

### **Jesus in Capernaum — 4:31-44**

Capernaum was a small city, located on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 25 miles from Nazareth. *Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee* (Matthew 4:12). This is where Peter, his brother Andrew, and the brothers James and John lived as fishermen (Mark 1:21, 29).

What does it mean *they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority.*

- After the Sermon on the Mount, *the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes* (Matthew 7:29). So for one thing, Jesus' teaching from Scripture is contrasted with the teaching of the scribes. Jesus described the scribes as hypocrites. They practiced their "righteousness" to be seen by men. And He said of them, *"You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition"* (Mark 7:9).
- Hearing Jesus speak was like hearing the author of a book speak about his book compared to another person speak about the same book. Jesus taught the Scripture as God, from God's point of view. The scribes taught as mere men, with their biases and prejudices hiding the truth of Scripture. They were more known for their quoting and knowledge of the rabbi's tradition than for their knowledge of the Scriptures. Jesus also said of them, *"... invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that"* (Mark 7:13).
- Jesus authenticated His teaching with miracles, as we'll see in the next verses.

### **The Demon's Interruption — 4:33-37**

This is the first time Luke records a demon possession, and it is also the first time Luke reports a miracle being performed on the Sabbath.

Observations about demons:

- *In the synagogue*—no place is off limits to demons—not even church, Bible study, etc. *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).
- *there was a man*—we’re not told anything about the man. Who he was as a person was lost to the demon.
- *possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon*—demons can take complete control of a person. (Angels do not do that.) Jesus didn’t diagnose the problem as demon possession. Everyone knew the man was possessed by the demon. It was obvious.
- *and he cried out with a loud voice, “Let us alone!*—the voice of the demon, not the man. Evidently a plurality of demons, often common.
- *What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth?*—They knew exactly who Jesus was—in His humanity. The demon(s) seem to wonder if Jesus was there specifically to do something to it. But God has no business to conduct with demons except to cast them out and one day destroy them.
- *Have You come to destroy us?* Obviously, the demon knows that Jesus has the power to destroy it, and it must have been wondering if this was that day.
- *I know who You are — the Holy One of God!*—Again, it knew exactly who Jesus was—in His deity. James 2:19 says, *You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.* There’s a difference between believing that Jesus is God and believing in Jesus. Remember, the demons were once angels in the presence of God and Jesus before they were cast out of heaven, along with Satan.

*But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet and come out of him!”*—Jesus did not have a conversation with the demon, nor did He answer the demon’s questions. But in one simple command, Jesus told the demon to be quiet and come out of the man.

—*And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst of the people*—like one final rebellious act, but yet obeying Jesus’ command.

—*he came out of him without doing him any harm*—Jesus evidently protected the man, so even the final violent act of the demon did not hurt the man.

*And amazement came upon them all, and they began talking with one another saying, “What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out.” And the report about Him was spreading into every locality in the surrounding district*—First they were amazed at Jesus’ teaching with authority, now they are even more amazed at Jesus’ authority to cast out demons. They don’t understand who Jesus is, but the word about Him continues to spread.

### **Healing Peter’s Mother-in-Law — 4:38-41**

This implies that Peter was married, and his mother-in-law perhaps lived in his house. The traditional site of Peter’s home is very close to the synagogue, perhaps 30 feet away. Matthew 8:14-15 and Mark 1:29-31 tell us that Peter, Andrew, James, and John were the ones who requested that Jesus come heal this woman. Matthew and Mark emphasize that Jesus physically touched the woman, taking her hand. But Luke only records that she had a high fever and that Jesus spoke to the woman, commanding the fever to leave, much like He had just commanded the demon to leave the man.

—The fever left at Jesus’ command, and **immediately** she got up and was able to wait on them, I assume meaning giving them food. Not only was the fever gone, but she was healthy and able to function.

### **The Priority of Jesus' Ministry — 4:42-44**

- *While the sun was setting*—At 6:00, the Sabbath ended, so people were free to travel.
- *all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him*— These people were not just sick with various aches and pains, they had serious diseases and had to be brought to Jesus by others
- *and laying His hands on each one of them*—He did not seem to have a group healing but rather individually laid His hands on them to heal them.
- *He was healing them*—He had compassion on them
- *Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ (the Messiah)*—like the demon earlier in the day in the synagogue. Jesus did not want His praise or acknowledgement of who He was coming from these unclean enemies.
- *When day came*—evidently He healed throughout most of the night
- *Jesus left and went to a secluded place*—Mark 1:35 says, *In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.* Though Luke does say in 5:16, *But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray*—even after “working” all night, Jesus spent time in prayer.
- *the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them*—obviously, they wanted to keep such an amazing teacher and healer in their town, contrary to the people of His hometown of Nazareth, who tried to kill Him.

But Jesus explained His priority: *“I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose*—While His miracles of healing got their attention, that’s not what He came for. It was the message in Isaiah, which He had read in the synagogue—*to preach the gospel.*

*So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea*—Judea would be specifically the southern part of the country, vs. Galilee in the north. But this word is also translated “Jewish.” So it would read: *So He kept on preaching in the Jewish synagogues.* Either way, the point is that Jesus was carrying out His purpose of preaching the Gospel to the Jews, especially in the synagogues, which is where the Jews gathered to hear teaching.

### **Thoughts and Applications**

1. Preaching the Word of God and prayer were Jesus’ priorities (though He certainly was a compassionate person and healed). Is they our priorities?
2. At first, we would say that the people of Capernaum were better than the people of Nazareth. But if their situations were reversed, they would have acted as the other did. The people were the same. What was different was what Jesus did in the two places. Read Matthew 11:20-24. With more knowledge comes more responsibility.
3. While the people initially responded in wonder and amazement, they did not repent. When Jesus refused to fulfill their expectations, they rejected Him and tried to put Him to death. Jesus was popular when He used His power to end their pain and suffering, but He was unpopular when the greater purposes of God for His life were made known. So it is today. What we need much more than physical healing is the forgiveness of our sins.

# Luke 5

## Fishers of Fish — 5:1-7

1. This was the shore of Lake Gennesaret, which is the Sea of Galilee. It was most likely by Capernaum, on the northern shore, where Peter and Andrew lived and had their fishing business.
2. The calling of the disciples seemed to be done in stages. For example, after Jesus' baptism, Andrew and another man followed Jesus for a day, to the place where He stayed (John 1:39). Later, Peter, Andrew, James, and John are called to follow Him, which they do, but evidently also continue their fishing business (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). But from this point on in Luke, these men leave their boats and follow Jesus everywhere. Other disciples were called individually (like Levi). Then after a night in prayer, Jesus appointed the 12 disciples as His apostles (Luke 6:12-19).
3. This scene seems to be the opposite of what we would expect—*the crowd was pressing around Him*, while the disciples were standing by their boats, *washing their nets*, seemingly apart from the crowd and the teaching that was going on. The Jewish historian Josephus estimates the people in the greater Galilee area to be about 3 million at that time.
4. *and listening to the word of God*—this is not referring to the Bible, as we would think today. They were listening to God speak, the actual words of God Himself (Gk subjective genitive, indicating “source”).
5. Jesus stepped into the boat, to use it as a way to make His speaking more effective, putting some space between Himself and the crowd. But, as we shall see, its dual purpose was to call the disciples to be fishers of men.
6. Peter had already met Jesus (John 1:41-42), and He had already called Peter, Andrew, James, and John in Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20 to follow Him. Only in Luke, is the final call recorded, where they abandon their fishing business and become full-time disciples of Jesus.
7. Jesus then said to the men: *Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch*. This was both a command and a promise of a catch.
8. Peter responded: *“Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.”* Notice:
  - They were tired. They had *worked hard all night*.
  - They had just finished washing/mending their nets. Now Jesus wants them to get the nets all out again? I wonder if Jesus purposely kept teaching until the nets were all washed, so the decision for the men to obey would be greater.
  - They *caught nothing*, after working hard **all** night, in the prime fishing period, when the fish typically are closer to the surface and where their nets reached.
  - And Jesus wants them to now, in the daytime, go out to the deep water, where it is obviously harder, if not impossible, to catch fish, because in the daytime, the fish go deeper into the water, where their nets would not reach.
  - Here's a test because Peter is the “professional.” Jesus has come into Peter's world, issuing an order that goes contrary to what this professional fisherman knows to be wise.
  - Nevertheless, Peter obeyed Jesus. He went out to the deep water, in the day, to let the nets down.
9. They caught so many fish, the nets were full, they called to the other boat to help them, and they filled both boats with so many fish, the boats were about to sink. Jesus is God over the seas and everything in them (see Nehemiah 9:6-7; Psalm 104:24-30; Isaiah 50:2; Daniel 4:35).

**Thoughts and Applications:** I wonder how many times God lets us go in a certain direction so that the act of faith and obedience is greater. For example, waiting while the men washed their nets, then

telling them to fish with their nets. Perhaps someone in our life does something that's not just a little thing to forgive, it becomes a big thing to forgive—to test your faith and obedience to God's Word. You know how it stretches your patience when you put that last dish in the dishwasher, late in the evening, only for someone to come up right behind you and start getting dishes out of the cupboard for that late night snack.

## **Fishers of Men — 5:8-11**

1. There were two responses to this large catch of fish:
  - *amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken*—Amazement is a pretty typical response from those seeing Jesus' miracles.
  - *But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet*—Peter realized that he was face-to-face with Holy God.
    - *Saying, "Go away from me*—Peter, aware that if he saw deity, then deity saw him, too, and the One who could see the depths of the lake could also see the depths of his heart. He feels exposed.
    - *Lord*—before, Peter called Jesus *epistates* "chief," a term of respect. But now, Peter sees Jesus as *kurios*, meaning "Lord," i.e., God.
    - *for I am a sinful man!*"—What was Peter now seeing as his sin? I think it was his resistance to obey Jesus to let down the nets. He sounded like he was the professional, and doubts that they will have a catch of fish. But now he realizes that Jesus is Lord of the sea as well. Peter thought he knew what was possible and what was not. But now he knows that with Jesus, all things are possible. Peter's previous thoughts were sinful, when he doubted Jesus—even though he obeyed.
2. Jesus' response is interesting:
  - *Do not fear*—What would Peter be afraid of?
    - It's like you are robbing a house, only to see the light go on and realize it's a policeman's house, and he's standing there with a gun in his hand!! Peter is a sinner, standing in the presence of Holy God. Later Jesus said, *Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matthew 10:28).
  - At the beginning of this section, Peter was drying his nets, at a distance from Jesus. Now *When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him*. We know Peter is married. What about their families, if they leave their occupation and follow Jesus? But now, with all these fish, Jesus has shown Peter that He is the great provider. "Do not fear."
    - This was definitely the catch of all catches for them as fishermen. And Jesus wants them to leave, just at the height of their fishing careers?
    - And what would it be like to follow Jesus full time? What kind of "job" was it?
    - As Peter recognized his own sinfulness, how could he follow Jesus, the Righteous One? It's like oil and water trying to mix.
    - As Dave said in the study book: It's better to fear God and have Him say, "Fear not," than to not fear God.
  - *from now on you will be catching men*—Lit. "to catch alive." They had been catching fish to kill them. Now they would be catching men to give them life in Jesus. Jesus is drawing a comparison between fishing for fish and fishing for men. To me, one big similarity is patience. Another is "catching." When you fish, you take the fish out of one environment and into a completely different environment. The same with catching men. So Peter, in a sense, was equipped for this ministry.

- Jesus now has a team, His primary four disciples: Peter, John, James, and Andrew, who will begin their apostolic ministry in starting the new dispensation of grace/church.

### Thoughts and Applications:

1. Before the successful catch of fish in the morning, there was a long, frustrating night of fishing failure the night before. The one area where Peter felt confident and capable was as a fishing expert. On his own, Peter failed, but was abundantly successful in obedience to Christ's command. Those who follow Jesus are those who realize they fail on their own. Those who feel sufficient in themselves will not turn to follow Jesus.
2. Our lack of faith is almost always traced back to an inadequate grasp of the goodness and greatness of God. Just as Peter didn't grasp that Jesus was Lord of the sea. When he realized that, faith was quick to follow. *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17). The experience of the catch of fish didn't create Peter's faith. It was the word of Christ.
3. When a person really realizes that Jesus is God, their next response should be that they are a sinner. People who think they are good and God should accept them the way they are, do not fully grasp the holiness of God. For example, if you are in total darkness and turn on a small pen light, you may **think** you can see clearly. But you don't. But then think of a surgeon with magnifying glasses on, using the bright focused light of surgery in contrast.
4. The text implies that to follow Jesus, we must forsake certain things. These men had to leave the very thing in which they found their safety, their security, and their significance. These things are different for each of us. Jesus also said, *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me"* (Matthew 16:24).
5. These men became fishers of men not so much because they were fishermen, but because that was the mission Christ had when He came to earth. To follow Christ means to do what He does. Jesus was calling people to come follow Him. That's also our mission—to seek out people who will follow Jesus.
6. Peter, using his own skills, caught nothing the night before. But he caught an abundance of fish, fishing Jesus' way. Jesus' way was a violation of the principles of fishing that Peter knew would bring success. Peter and these men had to leave their preconceived notions of how things are done. In the first chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul describes how the wisdom of God will seem like foolishness to men. For example, the world teaches you to be shrewd with your money; God says to do the right thing, even though it may cost you money. The world says to compromise, to tolerate, the ends justify the means; God says the means are everything—they are the path of righteousness. The world says to be happy; God says to be holy.

## Healing the Leper — 5:12-16

It's now been about a year since Jesus' ministry began in chapter 4. And it's here in Luke that we see the beginning of the opposition of the leaders of the nation against Christ.

1. In some city, Jesus encountered a *man covered with leprosy*. Literally, "a man full of leprosy." Humanly speaking, this outcast had a disease that was incurable, socially condemned, and viewed as God's punishment for his sins. In the Leviticus 13, seven types of skin disorders are described. Not all skin disorders are what we today call "leprosy." Although leprosy is definitely one type of skin disorder. The wording here in Luke makes clear that this man was **full** of leprosy. As such, Leviticus 14 tells us that he would not be allowed into the temple and would be quarantined from the society. [Over the centuries, these people often had to live in caves. With the gross disfigurement of leprosy, it's no wonder that many skeletons found in caves are deformed—from disease, not from an evolutionary process!!]

Leprosy today is also known as Hansen's Disease. It is a chronic, infectious disease involving the skin and nerves. It is spread like the common cold, but you have to live in a contagious area about eight years to catch it. 90-95% of the human race is immune to it. Pale patches appear first, then as nerve damage and other complications occur, there is a numbness and lack of feeling in the limbs, which then lead to festering wounds on the hands and feet, and then to characteristic deformities of the face and limbs (when the skin is numb, and with the lack of pain sensation, there is often traumatic injuries to the hands and feet). Today, antibiotics can quickly kill the bacteria that causes leprosy, if they are started in the early stages. In 2006, there were about 260,000 new cases reported worldwide. It's estimated that there are at least 3 million people living with some permanent disability due to leprosy. India has 54% of all new leprosy cases in the world, followed by Brazil with 17%. It's mostly found in the poorer Asian and African countries. In America, the famous leprosarium in Louisiana (about 20 miles from Baton Rouge) was closed several years ago. The only American colony is in Hawaii, populated by a small number of patients who refuse to leave even after the disease became treatable.

But in biblical times, lepers were isolated not only due to fear of infection but also because they were ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 13:45-46). In rabbinic teaching, leprosy was second only to touching a dead body in terms of defilement.

2. *when he [the leper] saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean"—*
  - With his severe leprosy, it's unusual that the leper would even approach Jesus, or be near any other people. He was past fear, past shame and any danger to himself or others. He literally had nothing left to lose.
  - He humbly bowed, *fell on his face*, before Jesus, in an act of worship.
  - Notice he didn't say, "If You have the power," or "If You are able." He appealed to Christ's sovereign will.
  - Why would he ask to be made "clean" rather than healed? According to Leviticus 13, leprosy made the person ceremonially unclean and unable to participate in the rites at the temple, but not sinful. So even if he was healed, the priest had to test him and proclaim him cleansed. It would be possible that he be healed but the priest not proclaim him clean, in which case, he would still be unable to enter the temple.
3. *And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him.* Notice:

- It seems that Jesus touched the leper before he is cleansed, showing that Jesus is not able to be defiled by this uncleanness. Jesus is not breaking the Law here by touching the leper. Rather, it's as if the leprosy recedes with Jesus' touch, so the leper is cleansed when Jesus actually touches him.
  - Jesus instantly healed a person of a very serious disease. The Bible only records two others having been healed from leprosy: Miriam, the sister of Moses (Numbers 12) and Naaman, the Syrian (2 Kings 5).
  - There was no lingering recovery period while the leprosy gradually got better. Modern medical treatment can cure leprosy, but cannot completely reverse the disfigurement and damage the disease causes to the human body. But whatever disfigurement caused by this man's leprosy was also healed by Jesus' creative power, leaving no trace of the disease or its effects on his body.
  - Jesus not only healed the man but pronounced him to be cleansed. Jesus therefore did that which only an Old Testament priest could only do after a test period, to be sure that the man was indeed free of the disease. When Jesus makes a person clean, there is no need for a test.
4. *"But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them"*—The man was healed, restored, and physically fit to take immediately a long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, where he was to go and offer the sacrifice for his cleansing and to be a witness to the priests. Jesus encouraged the man to keep the Law. The process by which a cleansed leper was readmitted to society involved going to the temple for an examination by a priest, shaving, bathing, washing his clothes, offering multiple animal sacrifices, along with an offering of grain and oil. The entire procedure lasted for eight days (Leviticus 14:1-20). But there is no indication that this former leper did that.
  5. Jesus warned the man *to tell no one*. Mark makes it even more emphatic. *He sternly warned him...See that you say nothing to anyone* (Mark 1:43). *But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere* (Mark 1:45), *large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses* (Luke 5:15). How difficult for the man. How could he not tell everyone. For one thing, people would notice without him saying a word—imagine a deformed, diseased man, now completely whole. As the report spread out, the crowds were gathering to Jesus, with the result that Jesus could no longer publicly go into a city, but had to stay in more wilderness areas. However, the people were coming to Him to be healed, not to hear His teaching.
  6. *But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray*. Jesus prayed in order to have fellowship with the Father. People did not understand why Jesus came to the earth, and the more people gathered around Him, the more the misunderstanding grew. They came to be healed. He came to die. But the Father understood, and Jesus treasured His time with the Father and was often in prayer to Him.

**Thoughts and Applications:** *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that"* (James 4:13-15). These are not just words. We need to mean it.

- This is similar to what Jesus did for us. He reached out and touched us, in our sinful state, and with His touch we were spiritual healed and made clean.



## Healing the Paralytic — 5:17-26

1. *...He had come back to Capernaum...it was heard that He was at home* (Mark 2:1). Peter's home was in Capernaum, and it's most likely where Jesus stayed when He was there. It became His *home* during His Galilean ministry. It's possible this event happened in Peter's home, but his home was small. It's more likely a larger home in which this scene unfolds, similar to the one in which Levi holds his feast for Jesus. *...many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door* (Mark 2:2).
2. *There were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there*—This is the first mention of the **Pharisees** in Luke. I'm sure they had the places of honor, in the front of the crowd, as was their custom (Matthew 23:6). They obviously had learned of the popularity of Jesus and were there to hear Him, pass judgment on Him, and decide what they should do with Him considering the threat He was to their leadership.

The word “Pharisee” probably comes from the Hebrew word meaning “to separate.” They originated in the inter-testament time. They separated themselves from the “common” people. They were the laymen and rabbis, who created the rabbinic traditions, and were teachers in the synagogues. Josephus estimates there were about 6,000 of them at this time.

It was their zeal for the Law that caused the Pharisees to become focused on rituals and externally keeping the Law. They abandoned true religion of the heart for mere outward behavior modification and ritual (cf. Matt. 15:3–6), leading Jesus to scathingly denounce their pseudospirituality: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others” (Matt. 23:23; cf. 6:1–5; 9:14; 12:2; Luke 11:38–39). Even worse, the wide gap between their teaching and their practice led to gross hypocrisy, which both Jesus (e.g., Matt. 23:2–3) and, surprisingly, the Talmud (which lists seven classes of Pharisees, six of which are hypocritical) denounced. Despite their zeal for God's law, they were “blind guides of the blind” (Matt. 15:14), who made their proselytes [converts] doubly worthy of the hell to which they themselves were headed (Matt. 23:15). The complex set of man-made rules and regulations was a crushing, unbearable burden (Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10). In any case, keeping the law could never save anyone, “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Rom. 3:20; cf. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; 3:11, 24; 5:4)—a truth that the zealous Pharisee Saul of Tarsus eventually realized (Phil. 3:4–11).

With the disappearance of the Sadducees [the priests, of the tribe of Levi] after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and the Zealots after the Bar Kochba revolt (A.D. 132–35) was crushed, the Pharisees became the dominant force in Judaism. With the completion of the Mishnah (the written compilation of the oral law, rituals, and traditions) in about A.D. 200, and the Talmud (the combination of the Mishnah and the Gemara [three centuries of the rabbis' commentary on the Mishnah]) in about A.D. 500, the Pharisees' teaching became virtually synonymous with Judaism [known today as rabbinical Judaism].

Luke also notes the presence of **teachers of the law**. Also called lawyers (7:30; 10:25; 11:45, 46, 52; 14:3; Matt. 22:35) and most commonly scribes (sixty-three times in the New Testament), they were professional scholars specializing in the interpretation and application of the law. They were commonly, but not exclusively, Pharisees (though distinguished from them by being mentioned separately; 5:21, 30; 6:7; 11:53; 15:2; Matt. 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; Mark 7:1, 5; John 8:3; Mark 2:16 refers to “the scribes of the

Pharisees,” and Acts 23:9 to “the scribes of the Pharisaic party”). Such scribes were also honored by being called rabbis (“great ones”), though others who taught the Word of God might also receive that title (cf. John 1:38, 49; 3:2; 6:25, where it is given to Jesus) [MacArthur].

*who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem*—Jesus started His ministry by disrupting the Sadducees at the Temple by overturning the money changers’ tables (John 2:14-16). Now the Pharisees from all over Galilee and Judea were worried about Jesus’ growing popularity with the people, so they came to check Him out. They want to charge Jesus with something “unlawful.” With this event, Jesus gives them the opportunity they seek.

3. Some men were trying to carry a paralytic to Jesus for healing. Unlike the leper, the paralyzed were not outcasts, but the people would look at his condition as God’s punishment for his sins (John 9:2).
  - The crowd formed a barrier to them reaching Jesus. So *they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus*. Mark 2:4 tells us, *they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying*. It would seem that pieces would fall on the Pharisees, who were sitting below—much to their displeasure, I’m sure!!
4. It doesn’t mention anyone making a request of Jesus. But Jesus knew what was going on. When Jesus said, *“Friend, your sins are forgiven you,”* it was a response no one expected—neither the paralyzed men, the friends who brought him, or the Pharisees. Of course, the paralytic and his friends wanted him healed. The Pharisees, however, were angry with what Jesus did say. They reasoned that only God can forgive sins, so Jesus’ statement was also a claim to be God.
  - In His response, Jesus was showing that forgiveness is both mankind’s greatest need, and God’s most important gift.
  - *Seeing their faith*—this would include the four men as well as the paralytic
  - *The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”* The answer is not what they want to hear. No one **can** forgive sins but God alone. Therefore, Jesus is God!! But they wrongly assumed Jesus was just a man. By claiming the authority to forgive sins, Jesus was either God, or a blasphemer. There is no middle ground. Jesus could not have been merely a good man, a true prophet, or a teacher of morality and ethics, if He were a blasphemer of God.

Blasphemy was the most heinous crime in Jewish thought, since it was a direct affront to the person of God. They defined three levels of blasphemy. First, one blasphemed God by speaking evil of His law, as Stephen (Acts 6:13) and Paul (Acts 21:27–28) were falsely accused of doing. A more serious form of blasphemy was to slander, speak evil of, or curse God Himself (Lev. 24:10–16; cf. Ex. 20:7). But the ultimate form of blasphemy was to assume the rights and prerogatives of God; to usurp the role of God and act as if one were God. It was this third and most severe type of blasphemy that the scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus of (cf. John 5:18; 8:58–59; 10:33; 19:7) [MacArthur].

5. *But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? A further proof of His deity, since only God knows the heart (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 17:10; Ezekiel 11:5).*
  - *“Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’”* Obviously, both are impossible for man to say (and it be reality). It would have been easier to say to the paralytic that his sins were forgiven, because there was no way to confirm or deny it by observation.

- “*But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,*” — God incarnate was about to demonstrate His power to remove sin’s consequences in the physical world. That would be proof He could overpower the effects of sin, implying forgiveness. It would be obvious to all whether or not the man actually got up and walked. Jesus chose to do the obvious miracle of physical healing **so that** they might **know** by observation.
- *Son of Man*—the Lord’s favorite designation of Himself, used by Him more than 80 times in the Gospels.
- *He said to the paralytic* — “*I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.*” *Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home*—There was no pause to wonder. *Immediately*, the man was healed.
- *glorifying God*—The man was not only healed, but his sins had been forgiven. We are used to that idea, but in the Old Testament, there was no sense of forgiveness of sins. The sacrifices were to acknowledge their sin, *But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (Hebrews 10:3-4). The sacrifices were a symbol of what was to come in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Repetition of a symbol is like multiplying with zero. No matter how many times you repeat the process, the result never increases. But Jesus, as God, is the only One who could forgive sins. When they glorified Jesus, they were glorifying God Himself.
- *They were all struck with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen remarkable things today”*—This time, Jesus did not merely do a miracle. He used the miracle as a teaching tool.

### Thoughts and Applications

- Outward man-made laws are always easier to do than to obey God’s laws. God’s laws leave it up to you to decide if you are indeed obeying them or not. For example, only you know if you are forgiving someone or not. And what that forgiveness looks like. However, a man-made law may say, “Forgiveness is going to the person and saying you’re sorry”—easy to do and easy to measure. We tell children, “Say you’re sorry.” We all tend to reduce God’s laws to something we can do and measure. But God’s laws are meant to be “un-do-able.” It keeps us humble and relying on His forgiveness through the blood of Christ. Man-made laws produce pride, and shut us off from the convicting of the Holy Spirit—what can the Holy Spirit convict us of if we think we are okay?
- All sin is against God, therefore, only God can forgive sin. The Old Testament sacrifices were a reminder of sin, not forgiveness of sin. It’s like if you have a disease, but you take medicine, and as long as you take the medicine, the symptoms may appear to be gone. But if you stop the medicine, the disease is still there. The medicine doesn’t cure the disease. Just as the sacrifices helped with the symptoms of sin because when you acknowledge your sin, you may turn away from that sin, at least for a while, but they never cured the sin problem. *Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins* (Hebrews 10:11). *but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, ...For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified* (Hebrews 10:12-14).
- Despite the unprecedented display of His divine, miraculous power, many refused to believe. John wrote, *But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him* (John 12:37). Faith does not come through experiences. ... *faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17). But people would rather have a “short-cut” to “spirituality” via some experience. Christ’s purpose was to *preach the Gospel* (4:42-44), to those who would hear. But the crowds wanted the miracles.

## **A Tax Collector Named Levi — 5:27-28**

The parallel passages are Matthew 9:9-17 and Mark 2:13-22. Levi is Matthew. Jesus *noticed* Levi, lit. “gazed intently” at Levi.

Capernaum was a city on the north/south route from Egypt to Damascus around the Sea of Galilee, and the east/west route from the territories of Herod Antipas and Herod Philip (separated by the Jordan River). Poll taxes and commerce taxes were collected for the Roman government. Many tax collectors abused their positions by using the power of the government to charge excessive taxes and keep the profits. Zaccheus said, *if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much*” (Luke 19:8). Also, remember that John the Baptist told the tax-gatherers to produce fruit in keeping with repentance, by *collect[ing] no more than what you have been ordered to* (Luke 3:13).

There is no evidence that Matthew was guilty of that, though. There is no mention of him returning any money taken illegally. However, Levi’s position itself would have alienated him from the religious community of his day. He was seen as one who betrayed his nation for material gain, because tax collectors gathered money from the Jews to give to the Romans (Gentiles).

The Pharisees assumed all tax collectors were crooked “sinners.” Probably, though, the tax collectors were not hated just because they misused their authority but because they were a painful reminder that Israel was not a free nation but was subject to Roman rule and authority. This should have reminded them that foreign domination was the consequence for disobeying the Mosaic Covenant.

The Roman occupation of Israel involved more than just a military presence; the nation was also subject to Roman taxation. The taxes in Galilee, for example, were forwarded by tax collectors to Herod Antipas, and by him to Rome. Antipas sold tax franchises to the highest bidder, and such franchises were a lucrative business. Tax collectors had a certain amount that they were required to collect, and whatever they collected beyond that they were permitted to keep (cf. Luke 3:12–13). In addition to the poll tax (on everyone, including slaves), income tax (about 1 percent), and land tax (one tenth of all grain, and one fifth of all wine and fruit), there were taxes on the transport of goods, letters, produce, using roads, crossing bridges, and almost anything else the rapacious, greedy minds of the tax collectors could think of. All of that left plenty of room for larceny, extortion, exploitation, and even loan sharking, as tax collectors loaned money at exorbitant interest to those who were unable to pay their taxes. Tax collectors also employed thugs to physically intimidate people into paying, and to beat up those who refused.

All of that was anathema to the Jewish people, who believed God was the only one to whom they should pay taxes. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors to their people, were classified as unclean, and were barred from the synagogues. They were also forbidden to give testimony in a Jewish court, because they were considered to be liars. Repentance was deemed especially difficult for tax collectors.

The Talmud listed two types of tax collectors, the *gabbai*, who collected the more general taxes such as the land, poll, and income taxes, and the *mokhes*, who collected the more specific taxes mentioned above (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 1:515–18). There were two kinds of *mokhes*, the great *mokhes*, and the little *mokhes*. The great *mokhes* did not himself collect taxes but employed others as substitutes. The little *mokhes* would be employed by a great *mokhes* to actually sit in a tax booth and collect taxes. Because they were the ones in contact with the people, they were the most despised of all tax collectors. Since Jesus found him **sitting in the tax booth**, Matthew would have been a little *mokhes*—one of the most hated men in

Capernaum. That his booth was located near the shore (Mark 2:13–14) suggests that he collected taxes from the fishermen, which would have made him even more despised by them than the average little *mokhes*. (MacArthur)

Jesus, with seemingly not even an introduction, said to Levi, *Follow Me*. It seems to me we have to assume that Levi, in the toll booth, was hearing much information from the people regarding Jesus' ministry there in Capernaum. He must have known about the men lowering the lame man through the roof, for example. He knew enough that *he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him*. Only Luke tells us that Levi *left everything behind*, much like Peter, Andrew, James, and John did, i.e., he left his job to follow Jesus wherever He went.

- That Jesus would not only save Matthew but also make him a disciple would be the most horrible news to the Pharisees. Matthew was a social and religious outcast in the Jewish society as far as the Pharisees were concerned. It's amazing to me because Matthew's gospel is the most Jewish of the four gospels.
- In all the gospels, there is no record of any words spoken by Matthew. In his own account of his calling, he said nothing about leaving everything behind. And he doesn't mention that the feast was something he gave in his own house. He seems to be a very humble and generous man.
- *Got up* is the past tense, meaning a decisive action. *Began to follow* is a verb with ongoing action.

### **Levi's Reception — 5:29-32**

*Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them—*

- Levi must have had a big house because it was a “big” reception with a “great” crowd of people.
- Many people were at this reception, including: *Jesus, His disciples, tax collectors, sinners* (see Matthew 9:10; Mark 2:15), and *other people*. The Pharisees would not have been invited to this meal, and even if they were invited, they certainly would not have gone. However, they must have been looking in the windows, because they grumble about the meal.
- This is probably Matthew's last act with his fellow tax-gatherers and his former way of life and also his first act of following Jesus. It was an evangelistic effort of introducing them to Jesus.
- That they reclined at the table meant that it was a long meal, full of conversations.

**Eating and Drinking**—The first question the Pharisees asked was concerning the people with whom Jesus was eating. *The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?”*

- *Why is He eating and drinking*—Jesus, it seems, was drinking wine. Luke 7:33-34 says: *For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine* (see Luke 1:15); *and you say, “He has a demon!” The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, “Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!”*
- Notice that Luke had not called the dinner guests “sinners,” but the Pharisees did.
- Eating and drinking with someone indicates a fellowship with them. Often treaties among nations are sealed by eating and drinking together.
- Also, notice that the crowd of tax gatherers around Jesus seemed to be enjoying their meal and time with Him. But the Pharisees were grumbling.
- The Pharisees defined “sinners” and “righteous” by human measurements. The “righteous” were better than the “sinners.” The “righteous” were “righteous” because they followed the Pharisees' rules and kept themselves separated from the “sinners.” They saw themselves as “holy” because of what they would not do, where they would not go, and with whom they did not associate. But Jesus came and did exactly the opposite, claiming to be God at the same time!

- It seems like the Pharisees and scribes were somewhere near there just to spy on Jesus and His disciples, to accuse Him of some wrong doing (according to them).
- Of course, they address the disciples, not the tax-gatherers and sinners who were present. And it seems more like a rebuke than an actual question. But Jesus answered them.

But Jesus said, *“It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*

- If a person sees herself or himself as “righteous,” then God’s righteousness is not available to them.
- Like John the Baptist’s message of repentance, Jesus came to call sinners, those who saw the need for repentance. But the “righteous” do not see any need for repentance. What would they repent of?
- The Pharisees were more spiritually sick than the tax-gatherers. Even though they considered the tax-gatherers to be such awful sinners, they had no compassion for them and did not reach out to them. Instead, they remained aloof, not wanting their hands to get dirty (see Matthew 9:13).
- The Pharisees misunderstood God’s purpose in giving the Law. It was not to bring about righteousness by works. *...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin* (Romans 3:20).

**Thoughts and Application:** I think this is why Jesus spent most of His time in Galilee. The self-righteous Pharisees and Sadducees were sold out to their systems of “righteousness.” The people in Galilee were not, therefore, they were more available to Jesus’ message. Today, when talking to someone about the Gospel or even spiritual growth, the more they are sold out to a system of manmade “righteousness,” the less they will be available to the Gospel. On a graph, if “0” is neutral, a person believing in manmade righteousness (such as world religions or the cults) would be below the “0” line. Anything about God and Jesus would be above the “0” neutral line. You can’t go above the “0” when the person’s thinking is below the “0”. The Galileans were more like people at the “0” line. The Pharisees were way below the “0” line.

- The obvious application of this first question is that you can’t evangelize people unless you are with those people. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, *I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one.*
- Don’t define righteousness the way the Pharisees did, by what you would not do, where you would not go, and with whom you do not associate.

**Fasting**—The Pharisees’ second question was why Jesus and His disciples were eating and drinking at all. *And they said to Him, “The disciples of John [the Baptist] often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink.”*

- Jesus gave instruction about prayers and fasting in Matthew 6:5-6, 16-18.  
*“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” ... “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face*

*so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”*

So when Jesus prayed, He was usually in the dark, off by Himself in the wilderness. Besides the time in the wilderness when He was tempted by Satan, there is no record of Jesus fasting, and if He did do it, He would have done it privately, not for show, as the Pharisees did.

Though the Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12) on Monday and Thursday, there is only one fast mandated in the Old Testament. On the Day of Atonement, the Lord commanded the people of Israel to humble or afflict their souls (Lev. 16:29, 31), which is a reference to fasting (cf. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, s.v. “Fasting”). The rabbinical writings forbade eating—even as much as a single date—or drinking on the Day of Atonement. On a day set aside for mourning over and repenting from sin, eating was deemed inappropriate. There are nonrequired fasts mentioned in the Old Testament (e.g., Judg. 20:26; 1 Sam. 7:6; 31:13; 2 Sam. 1:12; 12:16; 1 Kings 21:27; 2 Chron. 20:3; Ezra 8:21, 23; Neh. 1:4; 9:1; Est. 4:1–3; Ps. 69:10; Dan. 9:3; Joel 1:13–14; 2:12, 15), but they were spontaneous, associated with grief, mourning, and humbly seeking God. (MacArthur)

*And Jesus said to them, “You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.”*

- John the Baptist had referred to himself as the friend of the bridegroom and the Messiah as the bridegroom (John 3:29). Jesus also used this imagery.
- Jesus, as the bridegroom, is present with His disciples. So it is appropriate for them to rejoice. John was in prison, so it was appropriate for his disciples to fast as they prayed for him.
- There will be a time for Jesus’ disciples to fast, when He is arrested and crucified, even perhaps to the time of the descent of the Holy Spirit. They would mourn Jesus being taken from them. This is the first time in Luke where Jesus speaks of the time when He will be taken away from the disciples. Of course, at this point, they did not understand that He would die.

**Thoughts and Applications:** For the tax-gatherers and sinners, they found joy in this feast of fellowship with God. For the Pharisees, who did not know God, being in His presence was agony. For the one whose sin is forgiven, there is also joy in the presence of God. We will have to endure sufferings, as Jesus did, but there is the joy of hope of eternity with our Savior. *...fixing our eyes on Jesus..., who for the joy set before Him endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2).*

*And He was also telling them a parable. Although there are three illustrations, they seem to be just one parable, with the same point.*

*“No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.*

- There is no way to adopt or adapt to the old. To put a new patch on an old garment, you would have to:
  1. Cut the patch out of the new garment, destroying it
  2. It would not match the old garment anyways
  3. *the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results (Matthew 9:16)*

*“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.*

4. Again, the point is, if you put new wine in old wineskins, the wineskins will break, and you will lose both the new wine and the old wineskins. Old wineskins have lost their elasticity. If you put new wine in them, when the new wine ferments, it will burst the old wineskin.

*“And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good enough.’”*

5. This describes the person who views the old as better just because it is old, and the new is suspect, just because it is new.

**Thoughts and Applications:** It seems that Jesus is calling both the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist the “old” and Himself and His disciples the “new.” The Pharisees had a zeal for the Mosaic Law and their traditions. John the Baptist also had a zeal for the Law. But Jesus came to fulfill the Law, to end the Law, and to initiate the age of grace. Something entirely new. Where there is law, you cannot have grace. For example, if someone does something wrong to you, you are free to show that person grace, give them undeserved forgiveness. But if you take that person to court, you are bound by the law and its consequences. You are not free to give them grace. You can’t have law and grace at the same time. *For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).*

What do you think about this? If you are going to make a law about something, then there should be consequences for breaking the law. If you want to show grace, then you should not have a law. I think this may be a distinction between parents and grandparents. Parents establish laws because they are teaching children right behavior. Grandparents don’t often think in terms of laws. They think in terms of grace. They aren’t the parents. They don’t have that responsibility. But grace is given **after** the time of the law. The age of grace follows the age of Law on purpose. Grace from a grandparent is only effective because of the laws of the parents. The chaos of a child needs to be brought to order by the parents, with laws, so then grace can be given by grandparents. In fact, to take it one step further, a child probably will not recognize grace from a grandparent unless they understand the law from the parent. [It’s sad when a grandparent cannot practice grace and has to step into the parenting role of establishing laws.]



# Luke 6

## Keeping the Sabbath — 6:1-11

The Mishna [the written compilation of the oral law, rituals, and traditions] says: ‘He that reapeth corn on the Sabbath to the quantity of a fig is guilty; and plucking corn is reaping.’ Rubbing the grain out was threshing. Even to walk on the grass on the Sabbath was forbidden because it was a species of threshing. Another Talmudic passage says: ‘In case a woman rolls wheat to remove the husks, it is considered sifting; if she rubs the head of wheat, it is regarded as threshing; if she cleans off the side-adherences, it is sifting out fruit; if she throws them up in her hand, it is winnowing’ [Jer. Shabt, page 10a]. The scrupulosity of these Jews about Sabbath was ridiculously extreme. A Jewish sailor caught in a storm after sunset on Friday refused to touch the helm though threatened with death. Thousands had suffered themselves to be butchered in the streets of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes rather than lift a weapon in self-defense on the Sabbath! To these purists, the act of the disciples was a gross desecration of the Sabbath law. The worst of all was that Jesus permitted and approved it” [Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels*].

Rav Yehoshua Y. Neuwirth, *Shemirath Shabbath: A Guide to the Practical Observance of Shabbath*, English edition, says: Cooking in most all forms (boiling, roasting, baking, frying, etc.) is forbidden on the Sabbath, in particular when the temperature is raised above 45 degrees centigrade (113 Farenheit). If the hot water tap is accidentally left on, it cannot be turned off on the Sabbath. Escaping gas can be turned off, but not in the normal way. One must turn off the tap of a gas burner with the back of the hand or the elbow. The preparation of food is greatly affected by the Sabbath. One cannot squeeze a lemon into a glass of ice tea, but one can squeeze lemon on a piece of fish. That one cannot light a fire on the Sabbath is taught in the Old Testament law (cf. Exod. 35:3). Strict Judaism views this to prohibit turn electric lights on or off on the Sabbath. The problem can be solved, however, but using a timer, which automatically handles this task. So, too, an air conditioner cannot be turned on by a Jew on the Sabbath, although a Gentile might be persuaded to do so. One cannot bathe with a bar of soap on the Sabbath, but liquid detergent is acceptable.

## Eating Grain on the Sabbath — 6:1-5

*Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain. But some of the Pharisees said, “Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”*

- God allowed people to pick grain from a neighbor’s field as they passed through (Deuteronomy 23:25). But the Pharisees interpreted what the disciples were doing as threshing, work they said was not allowed on the Sabbath.
- The Mosaic Law said, *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy* (Exodus 20:8). There are other passages on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12-17; 35:2-3; Leviticus 23), but they leave it up to the individual to decide how to apply that.
- This is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the New Testament.
- Sabbath rest was begun by God Himself on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of creation (Genesis 2:2-3).
- It seems here that Jesus wanted to establish His right, as Lord of the Sabbath, to violate the law, even though He had not done so.

*And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read—The Pharisees were supposed to be the "professional" students of the Law. Their claim to fame. Jesus asked them if they had even read the text to which He referred.*

*what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?"—This passage is 1 Samuel 21:1-9. David was fleeing from King Saul. He came to the priests, and asked for bread. The only bread they had was *the bread of the Presence, which was removed from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away*. This bread was to be eaten only by the priests because it was holy, consecrated bread (Leviticus 24:5-9). But the priest gave that bread to David and his men to eat.*

- Yet the Pharisees did not condemn David for what he did. Why? Obviously, because of who David was. No one dared condemn him. He was the most famous and revered of all the kings.
- If David could break the Law because of who he was, then Jesus could also because of who He was. For He is even greater than David.
- There's another interesting parallel in Jesus mentioning this account of David. David, from the new dynasty, was being hounded by Saul, from a dying dynasty. Jesus, from the new dynasty, is also be hounded by the Pharisees, from a dying dynasty. A good illustration of the end of chapter 5, not putting new wine into old wineskins.
- In Matthew's account (12:5), he gives a further illustration. *Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?* Another example of something greater than the Sabbath: the priests working in the temple. Yet they are considered innocent by the Pharisees.
- Matthew also recorded Jesus saying, *But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent* (12:7). The innocent they were condemning was Jesus Himself.

*And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."*

- *Son of Man* was used by Luke earlier when the Pharisees rejected Jesus' authority to forgive sins.
- *Lord of the Sabbath*, i.e., *Lord over the Sabbath*, with greater authority than the Sabbath.

### **Healing on the Sabbath — 6:6-11**

*On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him.*

- It seems like the Pharisees were testing Jesus, who had just quoted God from Hosea 6:6, *"I desire compassion..."* I almost get the impression that the Pharisees deliberately planted this man there because they knew Jesus would heal him and they would then have a reason to accuse Him.
- The Pharisees lacked compassion and used the compassion of Jesus to their advantage.

*But He knew what they were thinking—Jesus knew their evil intentions, but He healed anyway.*

*and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And he got up and came forward. And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?"*

- The question Jesus asked is: What is the Sabbath for anyways? To make us miserable? To be a burden? To do good or to do evil?

- The Pharisees' laws allowed to help a person who was dying, but this man with the withered hand was obviously not dying. Jesus could heal him on another day. Yet, He did it on the Sabbath.

*After looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did so; and his hand was restored.*

- It's interesting that Jesus did not touch the man or even command that the man be healed. So technically, Jesus performed this miracle without even breaking the strict and legalistic rules of the Pharisees.

*But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus*

- They are not interested in following Jesus. They are not open to His teaching or His being the Messiah. The miracles seem to have no positive affect on them. They only want to get rid of Him. They continue to be in conflict with Jesus until they finally kill Him.

### **Thoughts and Applications**

1. The purpose of the Mosaic Law was never to make men righteous but to show men are sinful. Paul wrote, *for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin* (Romans 3:20). The Pharisees were wrong in their conclusion that keeping their interpretation of the Law would make them righteous. *There is none righteous, not even one* (Romans 3:10).
2. "Laws" and "morals" are not always the same. Witnessing may be illegal (Acts 4:19-20), but it is not immoral. Abortion may be legal, but it is immoral. The Pharisees kept their "laws" about the Sabbath, but they were immoral because they lacked compassion. Don't use obeying the law as an excuse to act immoral.
3. The Pharisees confused or blended their interpretation of the Law with the Law itself. It's a danger we all need to watch out for. Confusing our interpretation with the inspired Word of God sanctifies our opinions and even our errors, and makes it a mortal sin for others to differ with us. Be careful about equating our perception of the truth with the truth itself. There can be a big difference. For example, the idea that God sanctifies (which makes it a sin if you disagree) the local institutional church or the pastorate, both of which are not in the Bible.
4. The Pharisees viewed holiness as what they did **not** do. Jesus viewed holiness as what He did—showed compassion, for example.
5. David, the priests, and Jesus could violate the Law but still be innocent because of who they were. For example, we cannot change the words of a book, but an author can. We cannot run through a red light, but an ambulance can. So who you are determines whether or not you are subject to the law. Jesus did not have authority only to set aside the Sabbath but He had the right to set aside the whole law, which He did when He died on the cross. Also, because of their relationship to Jesus, the disciples were given the same rights as Jesus claimed. Our freedom from the law is the product of our relationship to Christ.
6. Good things which God gives can be easily corrupted and perverted by sinful men. Romans 7 says that the law is good but sin perverts it so that the law actually is used to entice men to sin (as Satan did with Eve). The Sabbath law was given for man's good, but it was perverted by the Pharisees.
7. Your perception of the purpose of the Law has everything to do with your motivation to obey it. If you view God as harsh and unloving and His law as restrictive and burdensome, then you will do everything you can to avoid obeying it. The Pharisees claimed they were obeying the law, but they developed a legalism that actually avoided God's commands. But if you see God's law as good and a delight to obey, as David did, then you will want to learn it, understand it, and obey it (Psalm 119).

## Choosing the Twelve — 6:12-16

*It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God—He most likely prayed about many things, not just choosing the twelve.*

*And when day came, He called His disciples [followers] to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles [sent out ones]—*

- There were others who followed Jesus His whole ministry who were not chosen. For example, when the disciples replaced Judas as one of “the twelve,” it’s written, “*Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.*” So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias (Acts 1:21-23). It reminds me of a jury of 12 chosen people with 2 alternates, who witness the whole trial, so if one juror is dismissed, the alternate can step in, having the same qualifications and having witnessed the whole trial.
  - There are other apostles, such as Paul and Barnabas, who are not part of “the twelve” (Acts 14:14).
  - Jesus invested more time and teaching in the twelve than He did His other disciples (followers) and the crowds. Being a sent-out-one means they had the full authority from Jesus for their ministry of starting the church. Of course, at this moment of time, they were unaware that such a thing as “church” would even exist.
  - *Simon, whom He also named Peter*, meaning “stone” (Matthew 16:18), compared to Jesus, Who is “bedrock.”
  - *Andrew his brother*—first a disciple of John the Baptist. He introduced Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-41).
  - *James*—John’s brother, he was the first disciple to be killed (Acts 12:2).
  - *John*—the last disciple to die. He lived to be in his 90s—about 30 years longer than the other disciples. He lived 20 years after the destruction of the Temple. He wrote John, 1, 2, 3 John, and Revelation after the other disciples had died.
  - *Philip*
  - *Bartholomew*, also called Nathanael (John 1:45)
  - *Matthew*, also called Levi
  - *Thomas*—known for doubting Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:24-29). Tradition says he brought the gospel to India. There is a church of Thomas in Chennai, India.
  - *James the son of Alphaeus*
  - *Simon who was called the Zealot*
  - *Judas the son of James*, also called Thaddaeus (Mark 3:18)
  - *Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor*—It sounds like he wasn’t a traitor at the beginning.
- Also, see the paragraph of the study book, page 14.

## Thoughts and Applications

- Different people get more time and teaching than other people. It’s up to the free will of the person. A teacher is almost always available to teach more, especially to those who are eager and willing to learn. These disciples had already chosen to follow Jesus. Now He was naming them to be the leaders of the coming church age.
- There is no guarantee of the future with the people you teach (and you **do** teach—your children, grandchildren, friends, relatives...). Some of Jesus’ disciples became great leaders in the church,

such as Peter, others totally denied the faith, like Judas. Do whatever you can, with whoever you can, whenever you can. That's your job. What they do, then, is their job.

### **The Sermon — 6:17-38**

Is this the same account as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7? Some people think it is Luke's version of that sermon, others think it is a similar sermon, making many (but not all) of the same points. In Luke's account, Jesus *stood on a level place* (v. 17). Luke's account is much shorter than Matthew's. In the blessings portion, the ones blessed in Matthew are spoken of more in the third person ("they," "them"), while in Luke's account it is second person ("you," specifically addressing the newly appointed disciples). Matthew's account is more "spiritual" ("poor in spirit," "hunger and thirst for righteousness"), while Luke's is more physical ("poor," "hunger"). Luke makes a greater emphasis on the contrast of time ("now"). Matthew's account deals only with blessings, while Luke also has cursings ("woe"). My opinion is that they are different sermons, given at different times, and in different places.

Notice that Jesus is addressing this teaching to His newly appointed twelve disciples. *And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say...* It's not addressed to His other followers or the multitudes.

### **Blessings and Woes — 6:20-26**

The term "blessed" (μακάριοι) was common in the Gospels; it occurs more than 30 times. All but 2 of the occurrences are in Matthew and Luke. Originally in Greek usage the word described the happy estate of the gods above earthly sufferings and labors. Later it came to mean any positive condition a person experienced. Unlike the biblical authors, the Greek authors drew happiness from earthly goods and values. In the Old Testament the authors recognized that the truly blessed (or happy) individual is one who trusts God, who hopes for and waits for Him, who fears and loves Him (Deut. 33:29; Pss. 2:12; 32:1-2; 34:8; 40:4; 84:12; 112:1). A formal beatitude was an acknowledgement of a fortunate state before God and man (Ps. 1:1; Prov. 14:21; 16:20; 29:18).

Beatitudes in the New Testament have an emotional force. They often contrast a false earthly estimation with a true heavenly estimation of one who is truly blessed (Matt. 5:3-6, 10; Luke 11:28; John 20:29; 1 Peter 3:14; 4:14). All secular goods and values are subservient to one supreme good—God Himself. This is a reversal of all human values. The Beatitudes present the present in the light of the future (cf. Luke 23:29) [*Bible Knowledge Commentary*]

These "blessed" statements are better understood when contrasted to the "woe" statements, so I'll put them together.

1. *Blessed are you [disciples] who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God...But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full*—These newly appointed disciples have given up their jobs to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11, 28). They will now be poor in comparison. Jesus died with only the clothes on His back. This does NOT say, "Blessed are all the poor people." Those who have not given up everything as the disciples did, are rich, receiving comfort now. Why are the disciples blessed? Because *yours is the kingdom of God*. The multitudes came for healing, but the disciples followed Jesus because they believed His message and that, therefore, they would have a part of God's kingdom. Their comfort would be in heaven rather than here and now.
2. *Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied...Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry* (they will not be in the kingdom). Again, the contrast between *now* and

heaven. The idea is the same. There are those who suffer now as disciples of Jesus will be rewarded in heaven. For the rest of the world, now is as good as it gets for them.

3. *Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh*—weep now, laugh (joy) in heaven. For the disciple of Christ, the eternal future in heaven is always given as our hope. Now is not the end.
4. *Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize [excluded from a group] you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets... Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.* The disciples (and those who follow Christ) will be hated, will be kicked out of Judaism (for us, organized “Christianity”), and insulted. They will say you are the one who is evil, not them. But this is the way all who are truly God’s people have been treated throughout history. But you should really worry if they start speaking well of you, because that’s how the FALSE prophets were treated. They tell people what they WANT to hear. Paul told Timothy, *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths* (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Every book in the New Testament, except Philemon, warns about false teachers/false prophets.

**Thoughts and Applications:** As believers, whatever your situation on this earth right now, *momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison ... for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). *Things, which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

### **Love Your Enemies — 6:27-38**

*But I say to you who hear [i.e., those who would follow Jesus] love your enemies—*

- These are all responses to a specific evil done to us personally by our enemy.
- This evil may be because we are followers of Christ, but that is not clearly stated.
- The emphasis is on our response, not the particular evil they do.
- These responses that Christ requires are contrary to Judaism (*eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot*—Exodus 21:24), contrary to our culture, and contrary to our sin nature, therefore, setting a follower of Christ apart from all others.
- These are not acts which one does in her own strength but are acts which one who has been saved does, due to the new mind and the new strength Christ gives through His Spirit.
- These responses could be misused. We need to balance them with the other commands we know from Scripture. It’s rarely a simple solution. For example, physical and/or sexual abuse.
- These responses are given in the context of the blessings and woes of the previous verses. For example, doing one of these responses might make you poor. Jesus said, *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God... But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.* Do you want to be rich here or rich in heaven? I think most of us want to be rich in both places.
- Obviously, practicing these responses will lead to other godly behavior, such as longsuffering, gentleness, etc.
- These practices are not to encourage or overlook evil but to overcome evil with good.
- Much of our love done towards others is selfishly motivated. We love others in order to be loved in return. We give in order to receive, we do good so that good will be done to us—to get our reward here on earth. Jesus said to act in order to receive your reward in heaven.

- We are to do what no one else will do—love our enemy. We are to do so because God loved us while we were His enemies and because God will bless us (in heaven) for obeying His commands.
1. *do good to those who hate you*—Paul wrote, *Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).
  2. *bless those who curse you*—do something good for them
  3. *pray for those who mistreat you*—It reminds me of Stephen, when men were stoning him to death, *Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!”* (Acts 7:60). From the cross, *Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34).
  4. *Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also*—Of course, there must be exceptions, such as physical and sexual abuse, but Jesus isn’t talking about the exceptions. He’s talking about the rule.
  5. *whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either*—maybe, give them more than they ask for. For example, if they need \$20, give them \$25.
  6. *Give to everyone who asks of you*—Obviously, you are not to enable someone who wants the money for drugs, for example. Again, He’s not talking about the exception but the rule.
  7. *whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back*
  8. *Treat others the same way you want them to treat you*—Often called “the Golden Rule.” This is the bare minimum to practice because it serves our own best interest. Usually, a person will respond to others in kind. Those who love us, we love. Those who are harsh with us, we tend to be harsh with. It does good so that good will be done for us. The Golden Rule is not bad, it is just not good enough. It can be followed by any self-seeking person.

*If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.*

- Peter wrote, *For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God* (1 Peter 2:20).

*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged, do not condemn, and you will not be condemned, pardon, and you will be pardoned, Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”*

**Thoughts and Applications:** Paul summed it up when he wrote, *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith* (Galatians 6:7-10).

## Parables — 6:39-49

I don't know from which perspective this parable is. So I will try to tell both perspectives.

*And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit?—*

- The people the disciples were to guide were spiritually blind. ... *the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God* (2 Corinthians 4:4). If the disciples were going to be leaders and guide the spiritually blind, they needed to not be spiritually blind themselves.
- From the perspective of the blind one being led, Jesus is telling them to not follow a blind teacher, or false or evil teacher, because the false teacher will lead the disciples to destruction, to falling into a pit. The false teacher is destined for the pit, and they will take with them whoever follows them and their teaching.

*A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher—*

- Obviously, teachers must be better than their students, else they would have nothing to teach. For example, we would not have a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student teaching a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student, but we might have a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student teach a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student. Students are in the process of becoming what their teachers already are. The disciples were in the process of becoming like Jesus. Soon, when the church age began, believers would be in the process of becoming like the apostles. We all are teachers—of our children, grandchildren, friends, family, ... If you plan to be a matriarch in your family, you must keep learning, so you can keep teaching. You don't want to end up being old with nothing to say. [By the way, this is not just a spiritual thing. The more you learn, the more you can teach. Learn the piano, learn to knit, learn to cook, be an avid reader, learn to use electronics, etc. This will make you an interesting person, someone others want to be around. It's the way you can give to others.]
- He may be talking about the disciples being the pupils. They need to be careful who they are trained by because whatever teacher trains them, they will be like that teacher. So be careful you are not following a teacher who is teaching you another way other than Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, *there are some who...want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!* (Galatians 1:7-8). The teacher does not merely impart a body of information but rather teaches the disciple to be as a person what the teacher already is. Only Jesus Himself is adequate as teacher. Our adequacy comes only by being rightly related to Him.

*Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye—*

- You must have better vision than the one with impaired vision, whom you are seeking to correct. If you are trying to correct someone with a particular sin in their life, yet you yourself have sin that you are not confessing and turning away from, you are a hypocrite—telling someone they must do something when you yourself are not doing it (do what I say, not what I do!). Of course, it doesn't mean we are sinless. Everyone has sin. But what is your attitude toward your sin? Do you repent or do you defend and justify it?
- Another perspective from this verse is that we are responsible for looking at the speck that is in our fellow believer's eye, that is, the sin that is in their life. We are to *see clearly to take out the*



*speck that is in your brother's eye. Paul said, I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, ... for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves (1 Corinthians 5:9-12). There is a process for dealing with a brother or sister's sin. It is described in Matthew 18:15-17.*

*For there is no good tree which produces bad [unusable, unfit, evil] fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush.*

- The superiority of some things can only be discerned by the better quality of their output. The only role of the fruit tree is to bear fruit. You don't try to gather fruit from thorns or briars. You pick fruit from fruit trees. The fruit is only as good as the tree that produces the fruit. The condition of our heart is invisible and can only be judged by the fruit. Christians are to live by a much higher standard than those in the world.
- If you want to get good fruit, good biblical teaching, you better go to a good "biblical" tree. It could be a warning against false teachers. Look at the fruit of a teacher. Is it biblical? Is it something you want to "eat of"? No one is forcing you. You are responsible for who you listen to, read, and learn from. Don't go to "thorns" or "briar bushes" or "bad trees" to get good fruit.

*The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.*

- What you do and you say is already in your heart. Jesus wants you to have a good heart so that what flows out of you and what you say is good. For example, you can't change what a child says by always addressing what he or she says. Instead, you need to teach them what is good in their heart. It's out of the heart's "good treasure" that good will come.
- And their heart needs to be "filled" with what is good. Just a passing good will not fill the heart. Divide your day up and give percentages to what you spend your day doing. How much of your time is spent filling your heart with good? How much is spent filling your heart with evil?
- "Whether one likes it or not, what one produces is finally a product of what one is. One can attempt to distort nature with an external veneer, such as tacked-on conformity to certain requirements of piety or respectability, but no one will be finally fooled" (WBC).
- One of the fruits to look for is what a person says. They will speak *from that which fills his heart*.

*Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?*

- Some people think if they intend to do something, it's the same as actually doing it. At the judgment day, there will be many who will say, "Lord" but Jesus won't know them. Jesus puts it so clearly: *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness' (Matthew 7:21-23). Even doing "good" things like casting out demons is practicing lawlessness if it's not done through a relationship with Jesus.*
- John wrote, *By this we **know** that we have come to **know** Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to **know** Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we **know** that we are in Him (1 John 2:3-5).*

*Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them—It doesn't do any good to listen to Bible teaching, to study your Bible, but not obey God's Word. James calls that "useless faith." *faith without works is dead* (James 2:26). It's like me saying I'm a good cook, but I never actually cook. I would be a useless cook.*

*I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great."*

- There's no question. The foundation is the truth of Jesus Christ. *For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 3:11).
- The most common interpretation of this passage, I think, is that when the hardships and sufferings of this life come against you, if your foundation is Jesus Christ, you will not be shaken.
- The flood and torrent that comes against the houses can also illustrate the judgment of God. Those who have Jesus as their foundation will stand in the judgment. Those who do not have Jesus as their foundation and have followed false teachers will collapse and be ruined.

**Thoughts and Applications:** To sum up the points of this parable:

1. You will become like whoever teaches you. And whoever you teach will become like you.
2. You are to correct sinful behavior in other believers. But make sure you have a repentant spirit toward the sin in your own life.
3. What you do and what you say will show everyone what is in your heart.
4. As a believer, God expects better from you in what you do and what you say. You are not to talk and act like the people in the world.
5. Don't think just because you agree with what the Bible says, that's enough. You must actually act on what it says. You must obey God's commands. Else, you are useless to God.
6. There is only one foundation, and that is Jesus Christ. Anything or anyone else claiming to be a foundation will only lead to your ruin, both here and in eternity.