

Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (10).

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SECTION 6.

Men Must Live In The Light Of The Coming Of The Son of Man In His Glory (15.1-19.28).

Having established in Section 1 that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the city of David where He was proclaimed 'Saviour' and 'Lord Messiah'; and in Section 2 that as 'the Son of God' Jesus had faced His temptations as to what His Messiahship would involve and defeated the Tempter; and that in Section 3 He had proclaimed in parables the secrets of 'the Kingly Rule of God'; and had in Section 4 taught His Disciples the Lord's Prayer for the establishment of that Kingly Rule and for their deliverance from the trial to come; and having in Section 5 seen in the healing of the crooked woman on the Sabbath a picture of the deliverance of God's people from Satan's power; this section now centres on His coming revelation in glory as the glorious Son of Man (compare Daniel 7.13-14).

(For the evidence that these points are central to the narrative see Introduction).

Section 6 follows the chiasmic pattern that we have already seen abounds in Luke. It may be analysed in detail as follows:

- a Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him (15.1).
- b The parables concerning the seeking Shepherd who goes out into the wilderness, the woman with the coins, and the three, the father and the two young men, who each make their choice as to what they will do, and Heaven's rejoicing when tax collectors and sinners repent (15.2-32).
- c The steward who used his lord's wealth wisely, and thoughts on using money wisely in preparation for the eternal future in the everlasting dwellings (16.1-13).
- d The Pharisees are blind to the truth about Jesus and cavil at His teaching, but all who see the truth press into the Kingly Rule of God (16.14-18).
- e The story of the rich man, and the beggar Lazarus, is a pointer to the wrong use of wealth in the light of the eternal future and to the unwillingness of many even solid Jews to truly listen to the Law of God, which will result in their being lost for ever (16.19-31).
- f The danger of putting stumblingblocks in the way of others, especially of children, in the light of the eternal future (17.1-5).
- g The servant who only does his duty in the expansion of the Kingly Rule of God does not expect a reward, for that is his duty (17.6-10).
- h Ten lepers come seeking deliverance and are healed - but there is only one, a Samaritan, who afterwards seeks out Jesus with gratitude so as to give thanks. Among the many the one stands out. He alone finally seeks Jesus in faith and is abundantly vindicated. Jesus asks, 'where there not ten cleansed, where are the nine?' and stresses his faith (17.11-19).
- i The Kingly Rule of God does not come with signs (17.20-21)
- j After first being rejected the Son of Man, when He comes, will come in His glory (17.22-24), men must therefore beware of false Messiahs. After this we have a cluster of Son of Man sayings (17.26, 30; 18.8, 31; 19.10).
- i The coming of the Son of Man will be unexpected (and thus without signs) (17.25-37).
- h In parable there is an unrighteous judge, (who represents God), and he is faced by one who comes to him seeking for vindication, a picture of God's elect seeking

vindication. God's elect must persevere in prayer and seek Him with faith that they too might find vindication. Among the many, the few stand out. Jesus asks, 'when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?' (18.1-8).

- g The Pharisee who thinks he does his duty and expects thanks for it, is contrasted with the one who comes humbly and is justified (18.9-14).
- f The Kingly Rule of God must be received as a little child (18.15-17).
- e The approach of the rich young ruler and the difficulty of entering under the Kingly Rule of God, stressing the wise use of wealth for the sake of the Kingly Rule of God (18.18-30).
- d While the Apostles remain partially blind to the truth about Jesus, (the fact that what is written about the Son of Man must be accomplished), the blind man at Jericho recognises Him as the Son of David and insists on being brought to Jesus and his eyes are opened, He insistently presses into the Kingly Rule of God (18.31-43).
- c The chief tax collector Zacchaeus uses his wealth wisely and yields it to the Lord, demonstrating that the Son of Man has successfully come to seek and save the lost (19.1-10).
- b The king goes to a far country to receive Kingly Rule, he gives coins to his servants to trade with, and his three servants have each to make their choice (19.11-27).
- a 'And when He had said thus He went on before, going up to Jerusalem' (19.28).

Note how in 'a' the section opens with the tax collectors and sinners drawing near 'to hear Him', and ends with Him 'concluding His words' before moving on towards His death in Jerusalem. In 'b' the shepherd goes into the wilderness, the woman looks after her coins, and a father and his two sons make their choices, while in the parallel a king goes into a far country, he dispenses coins to be looked after, and three servants make their choices. In 'c' the steward uses money wisely and in the parallel Zacchaeus uses his money wisely. In 'd' The Pharisees are 'blind' to the truth about Jesus and cavil at His teaching, while those who see the truth press into the Kingly Rule of God, and in the parallel the disciples are 'blind' to Jesus' teaching, while the blind man presses insistently into seeing Jesus. In 'e' we have the rich man who used his wealth wrongly and in the parallel the rich young ruler who refused to use his wealth rightly. In 'f' we are told of the danger of putting stumblingblocks in the way of others, especially of children, while in the parallel the Kingly Rule of God must be received as a little child. In 'g' the servant who only does his duty does not expect a reward, while in the parallel the Pharisee is confident that he has done his duty and boasts about it, but is seen as lacking. In 'h' ten men cry out for deliverance, but one man stands out as seeking Jesus and is commended and his faith alone is emphasised, in the parallel one woman seeks to a judge (God) and His elect are to seek out God for deliverance and are commended but lack of faith on earth is feared. In 'i' the Kingly Rule of God does not come with signs, and in the parallel His coming will be unexpected (and thus without signs). In 'j', and centrally, the rejected Son of Man is to come in His glory and false Messiahs are to be avoided (17.22-24).

Three Parables Dealing With The Seeking and Saving of the Lost (15.1-32).

It will have been noted how great a concentration there is in this section on preparing for the eternal future, and on the Kingly Rule of God. This will lead on to an emphasis on the heavenly Son of Man, and the revelation of His future appearing in glory.

In this chapter Jesus commences by vividly illuminating His coming statement in 19.10 that 'the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.' He does it by means of the parables of the shepherd going out into the wilderness to seek his lost sheep, the woman being concerned over her coins and seeking the one that was lost, and the three men, a father and his two sons, who are faced with choices. These themes remarkably parallel the descriptions in the parallel parable which immediately follows 19.10, of the king who goes 'into a far country' to receive a kingship, dispenses 'coins to be looked after', and faces up 'three men with their choices' (19.11-27).

The three parables in this present chapter have the one theme, the rejoicing over the finding of what had been lost. In the first two parables that is specifically related to joy in Heaven. In the third it is the rejoicing of the father, but as in that case the father himself represents God, the idea is the same. The first two parables are also parallel to each other in that both depict the seeking of what was lost. They also follow Luke's man/woman pattern which we find elsewhere (see Introduction), introducing alternately first a man and then a woman, both of who sought what was lost. In the third it is the father who is prominent, the father who compassionately welcomes one son and graciously guides the other, while the aspect of repentance also comes to the fore. Together the parables reveal the reaching out of God towards man, and man's required response.

Jesus here delineates three types of sinner. The first is like a sheep, he goes astray through foolishness and thoughtlessness, drawn away by the promise of better pasture elsewhere; the second is like the coin, he simply goes astray by accident or as a result of the carelessness of those who should be watching over him; the third goes astray by his own self-will and as a result of a desire for pleasure. But all end up in the same situation and all need to come back to the father in the same way.

The Parables of The Seeking Shepherd and the Lost Coin (15.1-10).

In these twin parables Jesus illustrates Heaven's concern over all lost persons, whoever they may be, and of whatever class they be, and stresses that His purpose in coming is to reach out to them and find them. He has the love of the shepherd for his wayward sheep. He has concern at the loss of a treasured possession. At the same time it illustrates God's election of those who are His, and whom He has given to His Son (John 6.37, 44-45; 10.26-29). For Jesus makes clear that there is a certain inevitability about the finding of the sheep because it is His, and about the finding of the coin because it is in the house and is His own treasured possession. Both are sought for until they are found. In this picture of a compassionate God who seeks out those who have sinned against Him in order to have mercy on them we have an idea which is unique in religious history.

We may analyse the passage as follows:

- a All the public servants and sinners were drawing near to Him to hear Him (1).
- b Both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners, and eats with them" (2).
- c He spoke to them this parable, saying, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (3-4).
- d "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing"
- e "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.'" (5-6).
- d "I say to you, that even so there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance." (7).
- c "Or what woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, does not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it?" (8).
- b "And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost.'" (9).
- a "Even so, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (10).

Note how in 'a' the sinners draw near to Him to listen, and in the parallel the sinner repents and causes joy in Heaven. In 'b' the Pharisees and Scribes grumble at Jesus receiving sinners (those who have been lost and are now being found) and eating with them, while in the parallel the woman calls her sinner friends together to celebrate with them that what was lost has been found (something at which Heaven rejoices). In 'c' the man has lost his sheep, and is

not satisfied until he has found it, and in the parallel the woman has lost her coin and is not satisfied until she has found it. In 'd' the shepherd rejoices over finding his sheep, and in the parallel Heaven rejoices over the 'found' sinner who repents. Central in 'e' is the calling of all together to rejoice at finding the lost sheep.

15.1 'Now all the public servants and sinners were drawing near to him to hear him.'

Gathered in the crowds around Jesus were large numbers of public servants and 'sinners'. The 'public servants were those who served the Romans in one way or another, either under Herod or under Pilate, both of whom represented Rome. They would include a large number of tax and toll collectors, men, often brutal men, who had taken advantage of the system to enrich themselves, and they would be as unwelcome to the sinners as they were to the Pharisees. We must not just ignore the truth about them. The 'sinners' were those who did not in Pharisaic eyes sufficiently follow the laws of cleanness and uncleanness, the laws of tithing, and so on. They would include those guilty of all kinds of sins, some mild, others more serious. But all shared one common position. They were despised by the Pharisees. Yet their presence here indicated that in their hearts there was a desire for the truth, and a recognition that their present lives were unsatisfactory. Jesus welcomed them as those who were seeking to change, not as those who would stay as they were. And while to the Pharisees their presence was an offence, to Heaven it was a joy.

'Were drawing near.' The verb is used similarly of crowds in Matthew 15.8, and the tense probably indicates their continual drawing near over a period of time. It was during this period of regular association with the crowds that the Pharisees and Scribes began to mouth their criticisms.

'To hear Him.' This suggests a certain attentiveness about their listening, (compare 14.35). They were listening, 'the Pharisees and Scribes' (for the order compare 5.30; Mark 7.1, 5; Matthew 15.1) were not. This idea of listening is important in Luke, see 5.1, 15; 6.17, 27, 47, 49; 7.29; 8.8-18, 21; 9.35; 10.16, 24, 39; 11.28, 31. He wants us to know that it is important that we genuinely 'hear'.

15.2 'And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners, and eats with them.'

It is clear that Jesus welcomed these 'public servants and sinners' openly (compare 5.30; Mark 2.15-16) and was willing to eat among them, quite probably often in a kind of picnic situation (as when the five thousand were fed), although no doubt sometimes being invited to people's houses. And this was so much so that the Pharisees muttered among themselves at what they saw to be His 'irreligious behaviour'. As they do not suggest otherwise, however, it is probable that even when doing so Jesus went to the trouble of proper cleansing in spite of the conditions. He still sought to avoid offence wherever He could. But that did not satisfy them. For even close association with such people was frowned on, and no Pharisee would have mixed with them.

It should be noted that the Pharisees and Scribes must not be seen as all bad. They would have welcomed these people one by one if they had come privately and had 'repented' and had been determined to follow their ways, but they would never have sought them out, and such a one would first have had to follow very rigorous procedures in order to be finally welcomed after appropriate cleansing. They therefore totally disapproved of Jesus lax approach.

15.3 'And he spoke to them this parable, saying,'

Jesus, as He often did, answered them parabolically in front of the great crowd. The singular noun 'this parable' may indicate the opening parable, or it may signify 'spoke parabolically'. 'Them' includes all who are in the crowd. He was being publicly criticised, He now gave a public reply.

In His parable ('this parable') He demonstrated that He was merely behaving like the shepherds of Israel should have behaved (compare Is 40.11; 49.22; Psalm 23.1-6; Jeremiah 31.10-14; Ezekiel 34.11-16; Micah 5.2-4). He was watching over God's sheep and seeking out those who had strayed. And as the parables advance He wants them to recognise that Heaven itself was involved, and that it was more concerned with moral purity than with ritual cleanness and was very open to sinners who repented, far more in some ways than to the self-righteous who were self-satisfied and did not recognise their need to repent.

15.4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness (the semi-desert pasture-land), and go after that which is lost, until he find it?"

Jesus deliberately addresses the 'sinners' among the crowd by saying, 'Which man of you', indicating by this that He is classing His listeners with shepherds, who were seen as almost permanently unclean, and as rogues into the bargain. (It probably made the Pharisees cringe to think that they were being included with shepherds). The question would awaken their interest. Note the emphasis on 'man'. This is partly as a contrast to 'woman' in verse 8.

The one hundred sheep represents a complete flock (an intensifying of ten). There is a perfect number, and of them not one must be lost (compare John 17.12). Each shepherd would know each of his sheep by name (John 10.3) and would not need to count them. He would see almost immediately which one was missing. (Most shepherds probably could not count to a hundred). Distressed at the realisation this shepherd leaves his remaining sheep with his fellow-shepherds and goes out to seek the one that is lost. And he does not cease in his search until he has found it. All faithful shepherds would immediately respond to the picture, recognising in it their common experience. But behind the parable is the theme of the care of God and His Messiah over His flock. 'I, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out' (see Ezekiel 34.11-12, 23-24).

'Lost.' The verb is used in all three parables in this chapter. The verb stem means to perish, but it extended to include what was lost, for such things had perished as far as the speaker was concerned.

15.5 "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

Note that in this narrating of the parable success is assumed. It is not 'if' He finds it, but 'when' He finds it (contrast Matthew 18.13, which demonstrates that the parable there was given on a different occasion. The emphasis of the parable would vary depending on the emphasis Jesus wished to lay). This carrying of the sheep on his shoulders would be normal practise for a shepherd. The sheep would be exhausted, and the shepherd triumphant and rejoicing (compare Isaiah 40.11).

15.6 "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost'."

Arriving home the shepherd calls together his friends and neighbours, announcing that he has found his lost sheep. Such a celebration might at first seem a little excessive, but we must remember that the shepherd would know the sheep by name and would not just be thinking commercially. He had found a beloved sheep. Then these 'sinners' (unlike the Pharisees) would all gather together to rejoice over the finding of the lost sheep. We need not necessarily assume that the rejoicing resulted in a costly meal, although no doubt some refreshment was available.

15.7 "I say to you, that even so there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance."

Jesus then completes the parable with a comparison. Not only do sinners gather together to rejoice in the finding of what is lost, but when it is a lost sinner so also does Heaven. God

Himself rejoices, and all who are with Him, for thereby is fulfilled 5.32; 13.3, 5. The only ones left out are the religious cynics who have no time or inclination for such behaviour. The Rabbis in contrast preferred to speak of God's joy over the downfall of the godless.

Those 'who need no repentance' may refer to the godly in Israel who are walking in God's ways making use of the appropriate means of forgiveness (people such as Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna), but the Pharisees would certainly have included themselves in the total.

'There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance.' This is not to disparage the ninety and nine, or to suggest that they were loved the less. The latter, if genuinely righteous, are fully appreciated in Heaven. However, they are not a surprise. But to find something valuable that is lost is an especially delightful surprise.

It is noteworthy in all this how confidently Jesus can speak of goings on in Heaven. For Him it was not 'beyond the veil'. It was home.

Further Thoughts on the Parable.

The first emphasis in the parable is on the fact that the shepherd sought the sheep. It is a reminder that it is God in Jesus Christ Who in His graciousness seeks us, not we who tend to seek God. The second is on the fact that He sought until He found it. When Jesus Christ sets out after someone He does not cease until they have become His. There is behind both these ideas the concept of election, the concept that we are 'chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and without blame before him in love' (Ephesians 1.4). The perfect number is fixed. Not one must be lost. (The same idea is present in Revelation 7.1-8). The third is the joy in Heaven once a sinner turns to God. It brings out that God is more concerned about such things than we are. The fourth is in a sense hidden behind the simplicity of the story, and that is the cost to the shepherd. Seeking a lost sheep could mean going into inhospitable territory, and the way could be hard. It can best be put in the words of the hymnwriter,

'But none of the ransomed ever knew,
How deep were the waters crossed,
Or how dark was the night that the Lord passed through,
Ere He found that sheep that was lost,
Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick and helpless and ready to die.'

And He knew the cost even as He taught this parable. He knew that 'The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day' (9.22). And yet He still sought the sheep, whatever the cost, until He found it.

And the fifth lesson that we must not lose sight of is that the one which was lost represents the outcast, and the despised. It represents those who while not precious in man's sight, are precious in God's sight.

The Woman And The Lost Coin (15.8-10).

As the analysis above shows this is in continuity with the previous parable and brings out Luke's tendency to combine parables together and to refer to both men and women. For similar pairs of parables compare 5.36-37; 11.31-32; 12.24-27; 13.18-21; 14.28-32, the centre three of which also include the man/woman element. (We say Luke's tendency, but of course the tendency must be traced back to Jesus). The stress in this parable is on the recovery of a treasured possession. For God's people are His own treasured possession (Exodus 19.5-6), and He does not like to lose one of them.

15.8 “Or what woman, having ten pieces of silver (ten drachmae), if she lose one piece (drachma), does not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it?”

In this case the woman has ten drachmae, again the number signifying completeness. The drachma was a Greek coin, often found in Palestine, which was about the equivalent of a denarius, thus representing a day’s wage. This was possibly her dowry money, saved up for the future, and it may have formed part of a necklace or other ornament. To her it was very valuable, a treasured possession, and the loss of any part of it would be heartbreaking. And that is what this parable is about. The seeking of a treasured possession which has been lost (Exodus 19.5; Titus 2.14; 1 Peter 2.4, 9).

Unfortunately, however, one of the coins is lost in the house and the completeness of her dowry is broken. The woman would experience a great sense of loss. She had watched over it for years and now this had happened. This situation would be made worse by the fact that the house was dark, for it would have had few if any windows, and the floor was probably of beaten earth and covered with rushes. The lost coin would thus not be easy to find. So what does she do? She lights her lamp, she sweeps the house, and she seeks and seeks and seeks with great diligence until finally she finds it. And she does it because of how precious it is to her.

The lighting of her lamp reminds us of the parable in 12.35. It is an indication that all is in darkness and that without the lamp of witness the coin will not be found. She is seeking to bring it out of darkness into light (Acts 26.18). Light is necessary if darkness is to be dispelled. Her diligence in seeking the coin parallels the durability of the shepherd as he sought the sheep. She will not rest until she has it.

15.9 “And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost.’ ”

And when she has found the coin she calls her friends and neighbours in to celebrate, and to rejoice with her. For she has found what was precious to her. Most of us know what it is to lose something, and the joy we have on finding it, but in our case it will not usually be quite so important to us as this coin was to the woman.

15.10 “Even so, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

But a greater joy than both is found in Heaven when a sinner repents. Here the rejoicing of the lost sinner who repents is in ‘the presence of the angels’ (compare verse 7). All Heaven is involved in the rejoicing. The one who is found is precious to Heaven. And we have in this parable the lesson that both men and women are to be involved in seeking the lost. It is not a ‘men only’ preserve. Each seeks within their own sphere.

The Rabbis would later tell the story of a man who searched for what was lost, but they represented it in terms of a man seeking the Law of God. They had no equivalent of a loving God seeking man.

The Parable of The Loving Father, The Prodigal Son and the Dissatisfied Brother (15.11-32).

When we come to the third parable there is a different emphasis in that the emphasis is laid, not on the seeking out of the person involved, (that has already been made clear in the previous two parables), but on his repentance, and on the father who is longing for his son’s return, and on the contrast with the elder brother who is angry when his younger wastrel brother is rapturously received. But it has in common with the others the finding of what was lost and the same emphasis on the rejoicing at the return of the one who was lost. It is a vivid picture of human psychology and emotions.

When considering the parable we need to have in mind the contents of the crowd. There were first of all the common people, the ‘public servants and sinners’, whose religious life was a

little haphazard, and then there were the ‘righteous’ people, those who were good living, responsive to God, and who genuinely looked to the sacrificial system to keep them in fellowship with God. And finally there were the hypercritical among the Pharisees and Scribes, men who struggled hard to build up a special level of righteousness and to ensure that they kept every letter of the covenant, but who thereby missed its most important underlying basis, the principle of mercy. The younger son represents the first. The elder son the second and third, both of whom needed to learn more of the grace of God.

We should notice that it is the parable of the *two* sons, as well as that of the loving father. It can therefore be divided into two or three parts, the first mainly dealing with the activities of the younger son, the last mainly dealing with the response to his return of the elder son, and the middle section mainly having in mind the loving father (although the father’s love shines out all the way through). The fall, and especially the repentance of the younger son, is vividly described, reminding us that it was not just any public servants and sinners, but repentant public servants and sinners that Jesus welcomed. But equally important in its significance is the resultant reaction of the elder son, for this vividly portrays the reaction of the Pharisees and ‘the righteous’ (those who wholeheartedly sought to live their lives before God) to His welcoming of public servants and sinners. It is not only hypocrites who sometimes find it difficult to understand how a man can live a long life of open sin and then be welcomed back at the end as though he had never sinned. Here Jesus will give something of an explanation.

Thus while the initial part of the parable deals with the welcoming of sinners, the final lesson arising from the parable deals with the harsh attitude that the ‘righteous’ might have towards the reception of repentant sinners. The question is not finally dealt with but is left open for all to consider. (And we must never forget that a number of Pharisees did become Christians).

But the overall importance of the parable is found in the compassion and wisdom of the father who was able to cope with both and sought to understand and be reconciled with both. He is the figure who unifies the parable and is its central theme. For central to its significance is the love of the Father, Who yet in His love requires repentance from both. Without that there can be no restored relationships.

Analysis.

- a And he said, “A certain man had two sons” (11).
- b “And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of your substance which falls to me.’ And he divided to them his living” (12).
- c “And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country, and there he wasted his substance with riotous living” (13).
- d “And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want, and he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine, and he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave to him” (14-16).
- e “But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, I am no more worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants”.’ ” (17-19).
- f “And he arose, and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (20)
- g “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, I am no more worthy to be called your son’ ” (21)
- f “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring the fatted calf, and

- kill it, and let us eat, and make merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to be merry” (22-24).
- e “Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called to him one of the servants, and enquired what these things might be. And he said to him, ‘Your brother is come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ And he was angry, and would not go in, and his father came out, and entreated him” (25-27).
 - d “But he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years do I serve you, and I never transgressed a commandment of yours, and yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends’ ” (28).
 - c “But when this your son came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you kill for him the fatted calf.’ ” (29).
 - b “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are ever with me, and all that is mine is yours’ ” (31).
 - a “But it was right to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found” (32).

Note that in ‘a’ there are two sons and in the parallel there are again two sons. This brings out the pathos of the remainder of the story. Ever since the younger son had left there had been an emptiness in the heart of his father. He had only had the one son. But now his other son has been restored. In ‘b’ the younger son claimed his inheritance, and in the parallel all that is left now belongs to the elder son. In ‘c’ the young man lives riotously, and in the parallel this is precisely the elder brother’s grumble. In ‘d’ the descent of the younger son into abject poverty is described, from partying (spending all) to swine husks, and in the parallel is the contrast of the hardworking elder brother, keeping on an even keel and always well fed but never partied. In ‘e’ we have the young man’s repentance and recognition of his folly, and in the parallel the elder son’s reaction and hardening. In ‘f’ we have the father’s joyous reaction to his son’s return, and in the parallel this is emphasised and expanded on. And centrally in ‘g’ we have the depiction of and stress on the young man’s repentance.

The story is partly based on Old Testament ideas where God said, ‘Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against Me’ (Isaiah 1.2). And the consequence was, ‘A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of Israel’s sons, because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness’ (Jeremiah 3.21-22a). And the reply then comes, ‘Behold we come to you, for you are the Lord our God’ (Jeremiah 3.22b). And who can fail to see the yearning of the father for his lost son in Jeremiah 31.20, ‘Is Ephraim (Israel) My dear son? Is he My darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I remember him still, therefore My heart yearns for him. I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord’. So the Old Testament is firm in its teaching concerning the Father Who yearns for His sons to return to Him, and is ready to receive them with mercy.

It will also be noted that, as we also find in Old Testament chiasmic parallels (see our commentaries on Numbers 18.4, 7; 23, 24 and Exodus 18.21, 22 and 25, 26), there are here in Luke repetitions of phrases within the chiasmus. Both ‘Father I have sinned against Heaven and in your sight, I am no more worthy to be called your son’, and ‘this my son (your brother) was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found’ are repeated. It will be noted that both are central emphases in the story.

15.11 ‘And he said, “A certain man had two sons,” ’

The parable is about two sons. But it is so easy to lose sight of the elder son (partly due to the vividness of the story, and partly because in our sinfulness we relate most closely to the younger son). Yet to Jesus the elder son was important, for he represented many of those to whom He spoke. He wanted them to come to repentance too.

However, it is the younger son who dominates the first part of the parable, and he is therefore

the one whom we have to consider first.

15.12 “And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of your substance which falls to me.’ And he divided to them his living.”

The younger son come to his father with the request that he might have his share of what he would in the future inherit. In a case where there were two sons this would normally be one third of the whole (the elder brother who would take over responsibility for dependants would receive a double portion), although in a situation like this where it was received early it may have been a lesser proportion (for the whole see Deuteronomy 21.17). Such an apportioning of an inheritance before death did happen regularly, and the principle behind it was that the sons would then have financial responsibility towards their father who retained a right to receive the income, and utilise the capital. But that a son would actually request it while his father was in good health would be an unusual case, and is probably intended to emphasise the waywardness of the son and the goodheartedness of the father. There was probably no thought at this stage of the younger son leaving home, except for business reasons, nor of him having the capital simply to do what he liked with. The younger son was probably only in his late teens, for he was unmarried, and had seemingly no thoughts of marriage.

15.13 “And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together (or ‘turned it all into cash’) and took his journey into a far country, and there he wasted his substance with riotous living.”

After a period, we may assume with the agreement of his father, the son turned his portion into cash and went to a far country (far from the father). The idea was probably that there he would establish himself in business, and increase their fortune. It was quite a regular occurrence for Jews to go to the great cities for this purpose, and in doing so he would require capital, which explains the father’s willingness to allow him it.

But the son, once released from home, went to the bad. Instead of concentrating on business he gave himself up to a good time and the bright lights. He forgot his obligation to his father (who still had a right to the use and protection of the capital and to any income from it) and used the money to live extravagantly and immorally. It is very probable that the elder brother’s summary of his behaviour was very near to the truth (verse 30).

This young man is a vivid representation of how large numbers live today. Like him they forget that it is God Who has given them their prosperity, and ignore His rights, and live totally to please themselves. They do not see themselves as having any responsibility towards the Father.

15.14-16 “And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want, and he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine, and he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks (carob pods) that the swine did eat, and no man gave to him.”

Like many a foolish person who receives a fortune he felt that he could ‘spend, spend, spend’. And that was fine until the money ran out. But unless the fortune is huge the money does eventually run out. And the problem in this case was that it happened at a time of famine. Thus he found himself in great need. The result was that he had to hire himself out to a foreigner to look after his pigs. To a Jew nothing could have been more degrading. Pigs were ritually ‘unclean’, and to associate with them was heavily frowned on and despised by all Jews (Leviticus 11.7; Deuteronomy 14.8; Isaiah 65.4; 66.17; 1 Maccabees 1.47; 2 Peter 2.22). And yet this young Jew not only had to live among the pigs, he had to eat the food that they ate. It was the opposite of all that he had ever known. He was homeless and friendless and lacking in even the basic amenities. He had reached rock bottom. We do not have to assume dishonesty. Eating the pig food may well, in a time of famine, have been part of the agreement. And he may well also have received a small wage. But there was no charity for him. He was an

outcast. His 'good time' friends had forgotten him. No one wanted to know him. The pig food was probably carob pods, of which the Rabbis would say, 'when the Israelites are reduced to carob pods, then they repent'. For carob pods were the worst possible type of food.

We must remember that Jesus is here describing the 'public servants and sinners', people who had wandered away from God and had lived for themselves. They had lived their lives as though God did not exist and by it they had lost everything that was truly worthwhile. Even the wealthy ones were spiritually 'living among the pigs'.

15.17 "But when he came to himself he said, 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger!'"

But while feeding and looking after the pigs he had plenty of time to think, and eventually he 'woke up'. He 'came to himself'. He recognised what a fool he had been, and what a fool he now was, and how he had sinned against his father, and against God. These latter were the marks of genuine repentance. And he also recognised how well off his father's servants were compared with his own position. He had not only forfeited his sonship (in Jewish eyes he had forfeited it the moment that he began to use his inheritance recklessly and disobediently instead of for the family honour) but he had even fallen to a level below his father's lowest servant. At least they were properly clothed and well fed, while he starved and was in rags.

What a difference there now was from the arrogant young man who had so loudly demanded his inheritance. Now he was humbled and willing to be a servant. There was a lesson here even for the disciples. For Jesus was constantly telling His own disciples that they must learn to desire to be servants (22.24-27). And it had all been brought about by adversity. The fire that Jesus had kindled (12.49) was working on his life.

15.18-19 "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, I am no more worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants.'"

So he vowed to himself that what he would do was humble himself, and seek a position in his father's house as a day-servant. He was well aware that he had lost his rights and forfeited his sonship. Nor would he try to claim any differently. He would not go back claiming sonship. Nor would he ask to be a favoured servant. He would only plead to be allowed to be a 'hired servant', a 'day labourer', to be fed and paid a decent wage while not being accepted back into the household. Perhaps his father would have pity on him and at least allow him this. It was certainly better than what he had.

Note his recognition that he had firstly sinned 'against Heaven', that is, against God. And then secondly that he had grievously sinned in his father's eyes. His father had trusted him, and had provided him with capital so that he could establish himself in business, and he had 'disappeared' and squandered it all. He was well aware of the social situation. He no longer had a right to claim sonship. All then that he would ask was employment in whatever capacity his father chose.

He was the perfect picture of the repentant sinner, coming with no pretensions, and with no claims to special treatment, admitting grave fault, and simply trusting in a merciful God to have compassion on him and forgive him and accept him just as he is. He is like the public servant in the parable of the Pharisee and the Public Servant who stood afar off and would not even lift up his eyes to Heaven (18.13). He is already on his way home.

15.20 "And he arose, and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

So he rose and came to his father. That was all that was needed, a turning of the back on the old life and a response to his father in order to beg forgiveness. For even while he was some good distance away his father saw him. He knew his son immediately in spite of his rags and

his bare feet. And moved with compassion he ran, and flung his arms round him, dirty as he was, and kissed him (compare Acts 20.37). This was a sign of acceptance and forgiveness (2 Samuel 14.33; Genesis 45.14-15). It was his son. He could do no other.

By this Jesus was openly saying that when we turn from our old ways and seek Him, God is like this. He welcomes us with open arms just as we are, and takes us as His own.

15.21 “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, I am no more worthy to be called your son.’”

No doubt very moved the son began to explain why he had come. He acknowledged that he had sinned against both God and his father, and that in such a way that he could not expect to be received as a son. That much he had to say in the parable lest the impression be gained that his sin did not matter. But not more, in order to demonstrate the father’s unconditional love.

15.22-24 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to be merry.”

But the father had forgiven his son, and he called to the servants to reinstate him in his former position. He was to be clothed with the very best robe available, a sign of status; a ring was to be put on his finger, a sign of his reinstatement to a position of authority in the household; and shoes were to be put on his poor bare feet. Shoes were worn only by free men, and in the house only by the owners. This was thus a repudiation of the suggestion that he be a servant and an acknowledgement that he was once more to be seen as one of the ‘masters’. And then the partying was to begin.

We are reminded by this picture of another who stood before God in filthy garments, one who as the High Priest was bearing in himself the sin of Israel, and how God in His grace had received him and re clothed him in glorious apparel (Zechariah 3.1-5) ready for his future service. And so does He offer the robe of Christ’s righteousness to all who repent and believe.

And once the son was clothed and freshened up the fatted calf was to be killed. This was the calf which in well-to-do households was kept aside and especially fattened up, and was then reserved for when important guests came. And in the killing and shedding of the blood of the calf every Jew would see an offering of gratitude and thanksgiving to God, and of atonement, for its blood would be poured out on the ground as an offering to God (Deuteronomy 12.24). And then all were to eat and make merry because it was as though his son ‘had been dead and had come alive again, he had been lost, and now he was found’.

The powerful wording brings out that the father had never expected to see his son again. Probably we are to see that when no word had come back the father had sent men to look for his son, but had discovered that he had covered his tracks too well. He had not wanted to be found. And the father had then reluctantly given him up for dead. He had become a ‘missing person’.

But now all was changed. He was back. It was as though he had risen from the dead. He was alive (compare Romans 7.9 for the use of the verb). He was no longer a ‘missing person’. He was here in front of their eyes! Like the sheep he was alive and home, like the coin he was found and restored as a treasured possession.

There were no doubt a number in the crowds around Jesus who were also missing persons, young men who had abandoned their homes. Perhaps now they would be made to think again. And there were others who would recognise that they had deserted God’s ways, and could now recognise that He was ready to welcome them back on their turning from sin and coming to Him.

15.25 “Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he

heard music and dancing.”

But then a new figure comes into the picture. It is the elder brother. He had been at work, ‘in the field’. He was the quiet hard worker, the faithful son, who had worked hard all these years and had enjoyed few luxuries. And as he approached his home from his day of honest toil he was astonished to hear the sound of music and dancing. The fact that he had not already been immediately informed of the situation may well have been simply because no one knew precisely where he was. Or it may simply be because it is a necessity for the story. The music and the dancing would puzzle him. He would be able to think of no reason for it.

15.26 “And he called to him one of the servants, and enquired what these things might be.”

So he called to him one of the servants and asked what the reason was for all this music and dancing. It was a complete enigma.

15.27 “And he said to him, ‘Your brother is come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ ”

And the servant told him what had happened. His brother had arrived back unexpectedly, and his father had killed the fatted calf because he had received him safe and sound. It is salutary to consider that the servants were apparently seen as more delighted than the elder brother. They were fond of their master and delighted because he was delighted.

15.28 “But he was angry, and would not go in, and his father came out, and entreated him.”

But the elder son was angry, and we are probably to see that all the resentments of the years rose up within him. He had originally envied his brother’s freedom as the younger brother had gone off to see the world, and then when his brother had squandered the money entrusted to him and had become estranged from the family, it was he who had had to work twice as hard to build up their resources again. And now here was his brother back again, and being treated as though nothing had happened. Possibly he also saw some of his inheritance disappearing with him. Whatever way it was he refused to join the celebrations. Like many such snap assessments it was a wrong assessment, as his father would now attempt to make clear. But it was a natural one. It brought out how unreasonable we can all be at times, especially when we are tired.

And when his father heard that he had arrived back and had not joined the celebrations, he realised that he must be upset, and he went out to him and begged him to come in and join them. Note how the father goes out to both sons, just as God reaches out to all men. He loved them both.

15.29 “But he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years do I slave for you, and I never transgressed a commandment of yours, and yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends, but when this your son came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you kill for him the fatted calf.’ ”

The elder brother could not hold back his fury. He pointed out belligerently how for years he had slaved, and had never transgressed against any of his father’s orders, and yet when had his father ever thrown a party for him, or given him a kid so that he could invite his friends for a meal? But now that this worthless and dishonest son (note ‘this your son’, not ‘my brother’) had arrived back, who had cheated them and wasted so much of the family’s wealth on prostitutes (the worst thing he could think of at the time) what happened? The fatted calf was killed in order to celebrate his return. It did not seem fair.

We note how extravagant his argument is. For in fact the younger son’s friends had not been invited to the present celebration, and the probability is that if he himself had at some time wanted to invite his friends round he could have done so. He has patently manufactured a case in his own mind in order to make it seem as bad as possible. And we see how he saw his life, not as a joyful day by day life lived with his father as they worked together and enjoyed

their privileges, but as a burden and a care and a trial, as something to be endured, the way in fact in which many religious people see it, especially those like the Pharisees. But before we criticise him too much we must remember that Jesus has drawn him like this in order that he might illustrate the Pharisees. It was probably one of the Pharisees' strongest arguments, both to themselves and to others, that all their slaving to keep the commandments and to 'do what God wanted' would bring its own reward, a reward lost to those who did not live as they did. And that may well have been part of the reason for their antagonism against Jesus. He appeared to overlook all their hard efforts, and yet freely forgave those who had done nothing to deserve it. Like the elder brother they were unable to rejoice in the free grace of God to sinners. It did not seem fair. And it was in order to bring about a change in this attitude that Jesus was telling the parable. For He was as much concerned with bringing the Pharisees round to a new way of thinking, and to a sense of compassion, as He was to bringing the public servants and sinners to repentance.

15.31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you are ever with me, and all that is mine is yours.'"

His father then gently explained the situation. 'Son.' This was a tender and loving way of addressing him. He wanted his son to know how much he appreciated him. 'You are ever with me.' He also wanted him to know how much he appreciated his loyalty. He acknowledged that all his life he had been faithful, never going astray. 'And all that is mine is yours.' Far from begrudging him a kid he wanted him to know that everything that the family owned was his. Whether we are to see this as signifying that this had been made officially so at the time when the younger son received his portion, which seems probable, or whether it was to be seen as tacitly understood, it was as the father saw it. Thus he would lose nothing by his brother's return. It was his right and it would not be taken from him.

It was also an assurance to all who heard Jesus that no one who had genuinely served God would lose out by it. If their hearts were right towards God then God would take account of all that they had done (Romans 14.10). Jesus recognised that there were at this stage genuine people among the Pharisees and Scribes and He was appealing to them. They would not lose their reward. God would reward faithful service. But let them not therefore be lacking in compassion and mercy. And He was putting up a case that no one could destroy. If any did lose out it would be as a result of their own fault.

15.32 "But it was right to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found."

And then He pointed out how right it was to rejoice in the conversion of sinners. It was right for the elder brother to rejoice because his younger brother had come back repentant and would escape the dreadful life that had recently been his (note his emphasis on 'your brother'). He could lose nothing, and gain much, by rejoicing with him. For let him recognise what had happened. One who had been dead had found life again. One who had been lost was now found. Was that not good reason to celebrate from an honest and unselfish heart?

By these strong phrases Jesus was also assuring all who heard Him that any of them who turned in repentance towards God, seeking forgiveness, would also find life and would be 'found'. So His message was to both, to those who were far off, and to those who were near while not being near enough.

We are deliberately not told what decision the elder brother came to. For the intention was that every one among His listeners who saw themselves as like the elder brother had to decide for themselves. That was a major point of the parable.

The Parable of The Astute Steward (16.1-13).

Jesus now tells a parable about an astute but careless estate manager who is failing to do his job properly. It is reported that he is 'wasting' his lord's goods by his carelessness, not

misappropriating them. When he is told that he is to be replaced, and must render up his stewardship accounts, he hits on a scheme which will put him in a good light in the eyes of others who might employ him, and at the same time will impress his lord. He will clear off some of the longstanding debts by means of what in modern times we call a Deed of Voluntary Arrangement. This will please the debtors and at the same time bring the money flowing in.

Under such a scheme both parties benefit. It is achieved by giving the equivalent of a large discount on condition of immediate payment. By giving the large discounts he will win the favour of possible future employers, and at the same time persuade them to pay up, and by clearing the debts, which might possibly never otherwise have been paid, he will at the same time please his lord, for it will reduce amounts owing to him in his balance sheet to reasonable proportions and will mean that he does actually receive some of what was due. To the debtors the manager and his lord will appear generous (although they will recognise to whom they really owe the benefit), to the lord he will appear efficient because unexpectedly the money is rolling in. It was a skilful piece of financial management, but at the same time may only have been necessary because of his previous failure to be efficient. That is partly why he is called an 'unrighteous' steward, not because of blatant dishonesty, but because of the margins he charges, the penalties he imposes and because of his carelessness and laziness in collecting debts. It is true that outwardly this has caused his lord 'a loss', that is a lower profit than he would otherwise have received. But it would ensure that the cash was rolling in and the lord would not be aware of the whole situation. Indeed he was rather impressed by his estate manager's efficiency. (But not sufficiently to retain him in his job).

Coming to such an arrangement may well have been easier because of the margins the estate manager was making on the sale of the produce, especially if payment was being made late and large penalties were being imposed in lieu of 'interest'. Such large penalties were a feature of ancient trade. He is thus cutting his lord's profits, not actually making a loss. The lord may not even have been aware of this. All he would know was what was 'in stock', what in general had been owed last time accounts had been rendered, and how much money was rolling in. And the sudden increase in the latter had clearly impressed him. Another alternative suggested is that the estate manager had built a commission into the prices and was foregoing his commission.

One of these explanations is required because of the unlikelihood of the lord commending someone who had blatantly swindled him.

Analysis.

- a He said also to the disciples, "There was a certain rich man, who had a steward, and the same was accused to him that he was wasting his goods" (1).
- b He called him, and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Render the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward' (2).
- c The steward said within himself, What shall I do, seeing that my lord is taking away the stewardship from me? I do not have the strength to dig, to beg I am ashamed" (3).
- d "I am resolved what to do, so that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses" (4).
- e Calling to him each one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first, "How much do you owe to my lord?" And he said, "A hundred measures of oil." And he said to him, "Take your bond, and sit down quickly and write fifty" (5-6).
- e Then he said to another, "And how much do you owe?" And he said, "A hundred measures of wheat." He says to him, Take your bond, and write fourscore" (7).
- d And his lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely, for the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light (8).
- c And I say to you, "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings

- (tabernacles)” (9).
- b “He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much,
b And he who is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much.
b If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon,
b Who will commit to your trust the true riches,
b And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s,
b Who will give you that which is your own?”(10-12).
- a “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (13).

In ‘a’ the steward professed to be serving his master but was serving mammon, and in the parallel Jesus declares that it is not possible to serve two masters. In ‘b’ the steward is called to render his account, and in the parallel it is by his account that a man’s faithfulness will be tested. In ‘c’ the steward asks himself what he should do, and in the parallel a good steward should use his wealth to make friends in the right place, in the eternal dwellings/tabernacles. In ‘d’ the steward decides what course he will take and in the parallel his lord commends him for it. In ‘e’ we have the steward’s solution, get the debts in by giving big discounts which will please everyone.

16.1 ‘And he said also to the disciples, “There was a certain rich man, who had a steward, and the same was accused to him that he was wasting his goods.” ’

Note that the direct recipients of the parable are the disciples. The message it contains is therefore primarily for them. The story opens with the case of an absentee landlord whose steward or estate manager has been reported for mismanagement which has been to the lord’s financial disadvantage.

16.2 “And he called him, and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Render the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’ ”

The landlord thus calls for him to come to see him and explains what he has heard about him. Then he tells him that he is intending to replace him and that he should therefore prepare accounts revealing the details of his stewardship. The impression given is that he is simply being replaced for mismanagement, not for open dishonesty. There is no suggestion of any action being taken against him, but the estate manager’s silence indicates that he is aware that there is truth in the charges.

16.3 “And the steward said within himself, What shall I do, seeing that my lord is taking away the stewardship from me? I do not have the strength to dig, to beg I am ashamed.”

This makes the estate manager consider his position. He realises that he is not capable of manual work, and he certainly does not like the idea of begging. Thus he engages in deep thought. The question is, how can he find compatible employment elsewhere?

16.4 “I am resolved what to do, so that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.”

And then the brainwave hits him. He feels that he has discovered a way out of his dilemma. We should note that the circumstances are very much against what follows being seen as actually dishonest. Dishonesty would hardly make him a likely contender for a job, however pleased the customers were, it would rather render him liable to prosecution, and it would certainly not earn him commendation from his lord. Nor is there any reason for seeing it in that way, for what he is following is in fact good business practise, even though the circumstances are a little unfortunate. The only dishonesty is in the reasons for the discounts, and, however much suspected, that would be difficult to prove

16.5 “And calling to him each one of his lord’s debtors, he said to the first, ‘How much do you

owe to my lord?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bond, and sit down quickly and write fifty’.”

The first debtor he approaches admits to owing a hundred measures of oil. The measure would be between five and ten gallons. Thus the debt is considerable. So he suggests a fifty percent discount on condition he pays immediately. To the debtor such an opportunity appears too good to miss, so he agrees. Both appear to be satisfied, the one because of his discount, and the other because he has obtained immediate payment. And the estate manager no doubt makes it clear as to whom he really owes this generosity. It should be noted that as the estate manager he would almost certainly have the right to allow such discounts, especially if large late payment penalties had been added to the amount due, and it is clear that there was a large mark up on oil.

The listening crowds might not know much about business, but they would know enough to recognise that this was an astute bit of business which indicated exceptionally high margins which had been reduced, and the cancellation of large penalties, not the making of a huge loss. The rogue had simply become more reasonable. (We can almost see them looking at each other and nodding knowingly. All would have suffered under such treatment, or have known someone who had).

16.7 “Then said he to another, And how much do you owe? And he said, A hundred baths of wheat. He says to him, Take your bond, and write fourscore.”

The next debtor admits to owing a hundred kors of wheat, another large quantity, so the estate manager takes the same tack and on this occasion only offers a twenty per cent discount. The margins on oil were probably a lot larger than the margins on wheat, or it may be that in this case there had not been such large penalties. The debtor is equally pleased at the idea and also pays up immediately.

So now the steward is able to present his accounts demonstrating that all payments are up to date, and is able at the same time to give his lord a substantial amount of cash or goods which he had not been expecting. It gives him every impression of efficiency, and everyone is pleased. The lord because he has received payment, the debtors because they have had big discounts, and the estate manager because he knows that he has impressed everyone by his efficiency and that he has made friends in the right places.

16.8 “And the lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely, for the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light.”

It is impossible to be certain whether ‘the lord’ refers to his master (as it does in verse 3), or to Jesus (see 18.6 for support for it meaning Jesus, and 14.23 ff. for support for it being the lord in the parable). The fact that in verses 3 & 5 ‘the lord of me’ means his master must be seen as confirming the probability that ‘the lord’ means the same here. It does, however make little difference, for certainly the second part must be referred to Jesus, and the point is simply that the steward’s action, involved as he is in the murky world of business, has demonstrated his efficiency and has thus shown how men of the world are wiser in business matters than the people of God.

‘The unrighteous steward.’ The estate manager has probably done nothing that could land him up in court. What he has done is make large margins, charge high penalties for late payment, and then make reductions to suit his own purposes. His lord may well still be looking at fat profits (even if not as fat as they might have been), and is certainly looking at a good deal more in terms of real cash than he was expecting. He may well not have seen him as unrighteous (that is Jesus’ description). He may rather have been impressed by his manager’s explanation of how he had got the debtors to pay up. (The estate manager was no doubt as slick in his explanations as in his dealings, as such people usually are).

‘Unrighteous’ is Jesus’ term for him because of his harsh and unscrupulous business methods, methods probably very familiar to some in the crowds who had suffered under them. From the world’s point of view they were not necessarily dishonest. He overcharged (although had in fact charge the right to charge what he liked, as long as it was compatible with market prices generally, or even more if he had cornered the market), added on large penalties, and gave large discounts, the last not in order to benefit the business but for his own benefit. But what cannot be disputed is his shrewdness and ability, and probably the large profits obtained for his master. From the world’s point of view he was the picture of success. Thus Jesus commends his application of business astuteness to the task in hand, but not his morals. Indeed ‘unrighteous’ is deliberately put in for the very purpose of deprecating his morals.

By it Jesus is also quite probably saying that such slick business methods are not really compatible with being a Christian even though they are not dishonest and have achieved their purpose. Christians should neither overcharge, nor charge heavy penalties (in the case of Jews it was contrary to the law against usury), even if such tactics are seen by other businessmen as legitimate, nor should they offer discounts which were mainly to obtain favours for themselves rather than for the estate’s advantage. But He is also saying that it does demonstrate how shrewd non-Christian businessmen can be, and that Christians should strive to be equally as shrewd in dealing with heavenly affairs, while of course avoiding the sharp practises.

‘The sons of this world (age).’ ‘Sons of’ is normal Jewish phraseology for depicting people of a particular class (compare 10.6), and ‘sons of the age to come’ and ‘sons of the age’ are both found in Jewish literature. While ‘sons of this age’ is not found, it is the comparative equivalent of ‘sons of the age to come’ in terms of this age. It is thus typically Jewish, and very much emphasises the worldly nature of those so described. The point is that they are totally taken up with this age and have no thought for the future. ‘The sons of light’ is a phrase found at Qumran, where it indicates initiated believers. Compare John 12.36 where ‘sons of light’ (without the article) are those who have believed in the One Who is the Light. Compare also Paul’s ‘children of light’ (Ephesians 5.8) and ‘sons of light’ (1 Thessalonians 5.5).

‘For their own generation.’ This compares the sons of this world with the present generation of worldly people to which they belong.

16.9 “And I say to you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”

Jesus then presses home the point that like the estate manager they should use wealth at their disposal to make friends, but in their case it should be friends whom they will one day meet in ‘Heaven’, that is, ‘in eternal dwellings’. They can do this by providing funds for the spreading of the Good News, and by benefiting the Christian poor, both of which will earn eternal gratitude. Then when they reach Heaven they will be rapturously received by those whom they have helped. (This might serve to confirm the idea of recognition of each other in Heaven). It should be noted that it would hardly achieve this if it was obtained or used dishonestly.

Alternately ‘they’ might refer to God and the angelic court (as with ‘we’ in Genesis 1.26), but, as it parallels the estate manager making friends by his efforts, we are probably intended to see the same idea here.

‘The mammon of unrighteousness.’ This simply means the money normally used by an unrighteous world, indicating that it is what the world in its sinfulness holds as of most importance. It might be seen as confirming that the ‘unrighteous steward’ was described as such mainly because he mingled with and traded in an unrighteous world, using that world’s methods. It does not mean money obtained by dishonest methods. It is rather worldly money sought for in a sinful world, in contrast with heavenly treasure which those whose hearts are pure seek after.

‘When it shall fail.’ One day it will come to an end and it will be useless. Indeed no one can take it with them through death. There are no pockets in a shroud. Thus all its benefits can only apply to this life and for the individual cease as soon as this life is over, as the rich man discovers in the next parable.

16.10-12

- a “He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much,**
- b And he who is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much.**
- b If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon,**
- c Who will commit to your trust the true riches?”**
- b And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s,**
- c Who will give you that which is your own?”**

Jesus then adds a general comment, applying the lesson. His statement is made on the basis of the facts that have previously been presented, that of someone looking after someone else’s possessions, and His point is that how we deal with such will determine whether we can be trusted with what is most important.

Note the slightly complicated pattern here which emphasises the unity of these verses. It commences with a positive initial statement about being faithful, which is clearly true, that someone who proves faithful in a smallish thing will be likely to prove faithful in something bigger. This is then followed by a negative initial statement about being unrighteous which contrasts with that, and makes the point that someone who fails to be faithful (is unrighteous) in a smallish thing will most like prove faithless in bigger things. This is then applied to the situation in hand. Someone who has not been faithful in dealing with unrighteous mammon can hardly be trusted with heavenly things, wit the true riches. And the further point is then made that someone who has not been faithful with someone else’s possessions can clearly not be trusted with being given things for themselves. They have proved both their untrustworthiness and their lack of capableness.

So on the basis of the parable it is made clear that the using of wealth wisely and honestly is an evidence of faithfulness and trustworthiness, but with the warning of what using it unrighteously will result in. Those who are faithful in what is accounted little (the use of worldly wealth), will be faithful in what is much (dealings with heavenly things). They will have proved their reliability and that they can be trusted with greater things. In contrast those who, like the estate manager, are unrighteous when dealing with what is little (worldly wealth), will also be unrighteous in what counts most (dealing with heavenly things). Thus how we treat our ‘unrighteous wealth’ is an indicator of whether we can be trusted with more important things. It is a barometer which shows whether we can be trusted in God’s service.

And that is where the estate manager had failed. He had not been faithful in the use of the wealth entrusted to him. Thus he had proved unworthy to be trusted with anything else. And the point is that the same applies to disciples of Jesus. If they cannot be trusted with ‘worldly wealth’, which is false riches, how can they possibly be trusted with more important things, with the true riches, with heavenly responsibilities? We should all take note of this as a warning. If we fail to cope properly and wisely with the wealth with which God has entrusted us, we will prove our unfitness to enjoy and have control over heavenly blessings. The widow at the Temple could be trusted with it (21.1-4), but the rich young ruler (18.18-25) and the rich man in the next parable (16.19-31) could not. The rich young ruler departed sorrowfully for this very reason. He had proved himself unable to cope wisely with worldly possessions, how then could he be considered sufficiently trustworthy to cope with heavenly things? The Apostles, however, apart from Judas (John 12.6), had learned well to avoid and disdain worldly wealth, keeping it in its proper place. They were fitted therefore to deal with heavenly things as long as they maintained that attitude. The unrighteous mammon had not got them down and rendered them unfaithful and unrighteous.

“And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?” This idea arises directly from the parable, and demonstrates that these principles equally apply to having responsibility for the wealth of others. If we cannot be trusted to look well and honestly after another’s wealth, who will trust us with any of our own? (Perhaps Jesus is already here giving Judas something to think about).

The main idea is surely that all wealth is finally God’s, and that any wealth that we may possess for a time is not ours, but Another’s. So if we do not prove faithful in handling the wealth that God gives us control over, how can we be trusted with greater wealth given by God to those who prove faithful, the true benefits of a genuine spiritual life and the responsibility of powerfully declaring the Kingly Rule of God.

16.13 “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Jesus then caps His arguments with a final statement. All this is true because no one can serve two masters. Anyone who has two masters will not be able to serve them in balance. Always one must take precedence. Thus every man must choose Who or what will be his real master. It is not possible to serve God and Wealth at the same time. One will always be loved more than the other. One will be clung to and the other despised. Thus how we use the wealth entrusted to us actually brings out who is in control. It brings out whom or what we serve, just as the estate manager had served his own interests and not his lord’s.

Thus if we only use our worldly wealth under the direction of God, with no regard for it but as a tool to be used as God wills, then well. But if we allow it to deflect us from doing and being the very best for God, then it will have taken over the mastership, and our commitment will necessarily suffer. Whatever our protestations we are declaring that wealth is our master. We are treating God as though He were less important than possessions. We are thus despising God. That is what Jesus observed in the rich young ruler and why He made such a total demand on him. He knew that wealth had too much of a hold on him, as indeed his final decision proved. He loved wealth rather than God. He was exactly like the estate manager!

Jesus Replies to The Mockery of the Pharisees Directed At His Ideas About Wealth (16.14-18).

The Pharisees had been listening in to his advice to His disciples and they derided Him. For in their eyes having wealth was a good thing. Some of them were wealthy, and others of them coveted wealth. But both were agreed that being wealthy and prospering was an evidence of being pleasing to God (compare 20.47; Matthew 23.14, 16; Romans 7.7-8). They thus did not see mammon as ‘unrighteous’, for they failed to look at the motives that lay behind wealth gathering, and failed to see how selfish it made people.

In reply Jesus does not specifically argue about wealth. He goes deeper down to consider the more basic problem of their whole attitude to life, and replies by pointing out how many are the ways in which they are lacking because of the sin in their hearts. His point is that they hold most of the views that they do because their hearts are not genuinely pure. This is not only demonstrated by their views about wealth, but also by the fact that they have not recognised that the new age is present. Unlike His disciples, they are not pressing into the Kingly Rule of God and responding to Jesus’ teaching. They are blind to heavenly realities. Furthermore they are also not observing the genuine details of the God-given written Law in which they boast, and this is evidenced by the fact that some of them even have their eyes on other people’s wives, and are justifying their behaviour by manipulating the Law so as to be able to marry them. They may deride Him, but if they would but look into their hearts they would scoff at themselves.

In the chiasmus for the whole section this passage is paralleled with the blind man at Jericho who insistently pressed himself on Jesus until his eyes had been opened. Here it is the Pharisees who are spiritually blind, while the disciples (who had been spiritually blind) are

pressing into the Kingly Rule of God.

Analysis.

- **a** The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things; and they scoffed at him (14).
- **b** And he said to them, “You are they who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts, for that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (15).
- **c** “The law and the prophets were until John, from that time the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God is preached, and every man enters violently into it” (16).
- **b** “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall” (17).
- **a** “Every one who puts away his wife, and marries another, commits adultery, and he who marries one who is put away from a husband commits adultery” (18).

Note that in ‘a’ the Pharisees are seen as lovers of money and in the parallel they are seen as lovers of other men’s wives. In ‘b’ we are told of what is exalted among men and is an abomination to God (their own interpretation of the Law), and in the parallel we have what is exalted by God, the genuine written words of the Law. And in ‘c’ and centrally we have what has even surpassed what is exalted by God, the Kingly Rule of God itself which all whose hearts are right (which sadly excludes the Pharisees who are dedicated to their own teaching) press violently into.

16.14 ‘And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things; and they scoffed at him.’

The Pharisees scoffed at His ideas (literally ‘turned up their noses at Him’). When Luke says that it was because they were ‘lovers of money’ he does not necessarily mean that they were greedy, although no doubt some of them were. He means more that their view of money was very different from that of Jesus. They honoured and revered it. It was true that they did consider that wealth was one test of a man’s righteousness, but for the opposite reason to Jesus. In their case it was because they saw its possession in abundance as being a measure of God’s approval. Taking the opposite view to Jesus they saw prosperity as the reward for godliness. They thus gave possession of it a high place in their thinking, not recognising the harm that it did men. They would certainly have approved of charitable giving, but what they did not approve of was Jesus’ idea that money should be held on to lightly and not seen as good for its own sake. That was why they mocked. Jesus’ view went against all that men believed.

They would certainly have theoretically agreed that God was more important than money, but they fell into the trap of not recognising (as most people fail to recognise) that they actually allowed it to influence them more than they allowed God to do. They were not true ‘lovers of God’, they were ‘lovers of money’. In their practical lives they actually loved Mammon more than they loved God. They exemplified all the wrong aspects of verse 13.

That this is true comes out in their history. Alexander Jannaeus in the previous century had warned his wife against the greediness and wickedness of men who ‘pretended to be Pharisees’ (i.e. were hypocritical Pharisees), and there is other evidence that proves that they were on occasions open to accepting bribes. While Jesus Himself spoke of the Scribes as ‘devouring widow’s houses’ (20.47), which probably refers to a tendency to sponge on them. So their reputation from this angle was certainly not blameless.

Jesus’ point is that what we love is demonstrated by how we behave. Those who truly love God hold lightly to the things of this world. But the very theology of the Pharisees made them take up the opposite viewpoint and see possession of wealth as highly desirable. And the result was that it then became loved for its own sake. They became lovers of Mammon even while

they thought that they were lovers of God (see verse 13).

16.15 ‘And he said to them, “You are they who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts, for that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

Jesus recognises that their derision goes to the very heart of what is wrong with them. They have built up a theology to which they can point to demonstrate the ‘rightness’ of their behaviour, much of which is actually an abomination to God, for it makes idols of their ‘laws’ which in fact themselves fail to make them righteous. He wants them to recognise that God does not smile on their posturing, it makes Him sick. All their emphases are in the wrong place.

It is true they can thus justify themselves in men’s eyes. Indeed men, who have similar wrong ideas, actually admire them for it. They parade their asceticism (Matthew 6.16), they parade their phylacteries (Matthew 23.5), they parade their almsgiving (Matthew 6.2), they parade their praying (Matthew 6.5), they parade their excessive ‘cleanness’ (Matthew 23.25; Mark 7.3-5), they tithe more than is necessary so as to make a good impression (Matthew 23.23-24), they make a great fuss about the Sabbath (while at the same time providing ways of avoiding the strictness that they profess), and it makes them proud, and arrogant. And people think they are wonderful and exalt them (compare 14.11; Romans 11.20; 12.16) because it is far more than they do themselves, and accords with man’s false view of God as someone to be manipulated by such methods.

Yet they are at the same time cold, and heartless, and supercritical and lacking in compassion when dealing with people. They are missing out on ‘the weightier matters of the Law’, justice, faith and mercy (Matthew 23.23). Their whole way of life is thus an abomination in the sight of God because of their pride (compare Proverbs 16.5), their religious posturing (Isaiah 1.13), and their unjust dealings (Proverbs 11.1). This is because it all stems from the wrong motives, from the idea of bargaining with God to obtain His favour (if we obey the covenant you will give us eternal life and establish Israel), the desire to be approved of and admired by men, and an over-readiness to criticise anyone who fails to agree with and fit into their ideas. Men may esteem such ideas, but God abhors them. For while the first statement, that a satisfying life comes about through keeping the Law, is, if correctly stated, theoretically in accordance with Scripture (Leviticus 18.5), none of them can achieve it because they have already sinned, and sin constantly. Thus if it is seen as a bargaining counter they are seeking to achieve the impossible.

But what the Scripture was promising (Leviticus 18.5) was not some arduous way into Heaven, it was that by living in accordance with His Law they would enjoy a full life in fellowship with God. So God was not there speaking of achieving eternal life through it. That could only be through God’s gift (Romans 6.23). That could only be obtained through God’s mercy alone. Thus in doing what they were doing, they were striving to fulfil a goal that they had laid out for themselves, and were missing what was most important, the fact that the new age with its Good News was here, so that eternal life was being offered through faith in Him. Furthermore they had also by their methods distorted the written and infallible Law of God, which they had transformed into something unrecognisable.

‘That which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.’ We have seen above some of the things that men exalt in, but which God hates, but there are two actually mentioned in the passage. The first is their love of wealth. Most men agree with them and exalt in it, but how much God abominates it comes out in the parable that follows. For it stands between men and true goodness. In the parable Abraham, (surely an authority whom the Pharisees will recognise), is pictured as informing the rich man that ‘remember that you in your lifetime received your good things ---but now --- you are in anguish’. Here then is a warning of the danger of riches. Those who bask in good things now are in danger for the

future unless they ensure that others more needy can bask in the good things too. But the second will be mentioned rather unexpectedly in verse 18, for we must ask why does He in context bring up the question of divorce? We have already seen that the verse parallels verse 14 in the chiasmus, which suggests that it speaks of something else which the Pharisees love. This suggests that while they were too chaste to engage in open adultery or involvement with prostitutes, they did not mind, or object to, indulging in adultery through marriage with divorced persons. (Perhaps some recent case was especially in Jesus' mind). That too was esteemed among men, but was abomination in the sight of God.

16.16 "The law and the prophets were until John, from that time the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God is preached, and every man enters violently into it (or 'every man is overpowered by it')."

Their next major failure lay in their having failed to recognise God's intervention in history. They professed to honour the Law and the Prophets, and that was good in so far as it was true, but they had failed to recognise that with the coming of John the Baptist, and especially in His own coming, these were in process of fulfilment. Now as promised by Isaiah 61.1-2 the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God (4.43; 8.1; Acts 8.12) was being proclaimed, and men were 'pressing into it with great violence'. They were 'striving to enter in at the narrow door' (13.24). They were 'taking up their crosses and following Him' (14.27; 9.23). A great work of revival was taking place. The Pharisees themselves, on the other hand, having failed to recognise it, were failing to enter. That was their problem. They were so bound by their own teaching that they failed to recognise heavenly realities. And in the same way they also failed to recognise the dangers of wealth and divorce, which hit at the very root of men's lives.

Alternately the verb can be translated as in the passive voice in which case it means 'every man is overpowered by it'. Then we may see it as signifying that the fire of His word, which He has cast on the earth, has possessed them (12.49), the Kingly Rule of God has overpowered them and taken them captive.

Whichever is the case the 'all' refers to the disciples to whom He had spoken the previous parable. In contrast with the Pharisees they have revealed their determination to be under the Kingly Rule of God.

16.17 "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall."

But all this does not mean that the Instruction of God (the Law) has been superseded, for nothing in that Instruction can fail. Heaven and earth will pass away before that can happen. Every last letter or part of letter is sacrosanct. The tittle (or 'horn') was the addition made to some Hebrew letters in order to differentiate them (compare Matthew 5.18 which has 'not one iota or tittle'). We should note Jesus' high view of Scripture.

And it is the Kingly Rule of God under which that true Instruction will be fulfilled. But the problem here is that the Pharisees, far from honouring God's Instruction in this way, have woven it into a pattern of their own choosing. The result is that it means that they are failing to recognise its true meaning and its fulfilment in Him. For while it is their claim that they honour that Instruction, and would even die for it, they have in fact transformed it into something unrecognisable, as He will now evidence from one example, their teaching on divorce.

16.18 "Every one who puts away his wife, and marries another, commits adultery, and he who marries one who is put away from a husband commits adultery."

For God's Instruction says that every man who puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery. And that anyone who marries a divorced person commits adultery. This is because, as Genesis 2.23-24 makes clear, when a man and a woman marry they become 'one flesh'. That is why Jesus elsewhere declares, 'what God has joined together let not man put

asunder' (Mark 10.9; Matthew 19.6). So having become one flesh they are inseparable, and to break that oneness in any way can only bring them under the displeasure of God. This means that when a man puts away his wife and marries another he commits adultery. He falsely breaks the tie that binds him to his first wife.

The particular addition of the second part of the verse, 'he who marries one who is put away from a husband commits adultery', may indicate a propensity on the part of Pharisees to marry wives who have been divorced. Perhaps they saw themselves as obtaining merit through it, or perhaps there were particularly outstanding cases that Jesus has in mind.

This particular example was a good one to use as easy divorce caused such clear and open distress to innocent women. It very much revealed the worst side of the Pharisees who had a contempt for women. All listening would recognise the point, for on the whole the Rabbis had watered this Law down so much that divorce was allowed for the most trivial of reasons. By a misuse of Deuteronomy 24.1-4 they had made void the Law through their traditions. Hillel allowed a man to divorce his wife if she burned the dinner, or if she talked to a strange man, or if she talked disrespectfully about his relations in his presence, and Akiba allowed it if a man found someone prettier than his wife. Thus was the sacredness of marriage, established at creation (Genesis 2.24), treated with mockery. On the other hand a woman was not allowed to initiate divorce for any reason whatsoever. All this was a scandalous treatment of the Law and made a mockery of it. But it epitomised the whole Pharisaic attitude to the Law and to women. In one sense they treated the Law very reverently, but by their manipulation of it they often made a fool of it.

So the Pharisees, having mocked Jesus because of His teaching on riches, have suddenly had the tables turned on them. He has demonstrated not only that they cannot 'see the Kingly Rule of God' (compare John 3.2), but also how they misuse the Law in even what is most basic to a satisfactory family life. They are seen as totally unreliable guides, and as destroying what lies at the very root of a stable society. Rather than simply argue with them about riches He has totally laid bare the bankruptcy of their whole lives and teaching.

The dual thoughts of the use of riches, and the validity of the Law and the prophets now lead into the story of the rich man and Lazarus. This commences with the false behaviour of a rich man and ends with an appeal to the Law and the prophets, that Law which, if given its Scriptural interpretation ('the prophets') rather than its Pharisaic interpretation, will, if men heed it, prevent them taking the downward path. But, as he has already stressed, the Pharisees have manipulated that Law to suit their own ideas, and it has therefore for them lost its effectiveness. And He will now also make clear that it is precisely because the rich man, like the Pharisees, has manipulated the Law of Moses and the prophets, and has in his case withheld help from the poor, that he ends up as he does.

The Rich Man and Lazarus (16.19-31).

This story deals with two aspects of what has gone before, the danger of possessing riches and not using them rightly, and the danger of ignoring God's true Instruction. Jesus will point out that if only the rich man had heeded the Instruction given by Moses and the prophets he would not have ended up in Hades, and it is equally open to his brothers (and by implication the Pharisees) to hear it too. If they do not then the fault lies with them. It illustrates the fact the one who is highly exalted among men may well be an abomination in the sight of God (verse 15).

The story is closely connected with what has gone before. Had the rich man recognised that his wealth was entrusted to him by God for the purpose of using it in God's service, and had he sought friends in eternal dwellings by having a heart right towards God, so that he used his wealth properly, he would not have ended up where he did (verse 9). But his attitude was like that of the Pharisees (verses 14-15). He considered that his wealth demonstrated how good he

was, and did not realise what it had turned him into. It was a warning to the Pharisees, who had jeered at His teaching about wealth, of what their attitude to wealth could result in. In contrast Lazarus did have friends in eternal dwellings, because by being named he is revealed as one whose name was written in Heaven (10.20). It was further a warning to the Pharisees that they should listen to Moses and the prophets (verses 16, 29, 31), and not to traditions that were not genuinely the word of God (Mark 7.13).

Some claim that this is not a parable but a true story, partly on the grounds that the idea of it being a parable is not mentioned, and partly because Jesus does not usually include names in parables. However there are certainly other parables where they are clearly parables and yet are not so described, and it may be argued that the name is given to the beggar in order specifically to indicate his relationship with God. For it is by naming him that Jesus is able to convey the fact that he is a godly man. This is revealed by the fact that his name means 'God has helped'. Jesus did not want to give the impression that all poor men automatically went to 'Heaven', but it was only those with a relationship with God. (Lazarus, or Eleazar, was a highly popular name at this period and there is absolutely no reason why we should connect this Lazarus with the one described in John 11). In fact fictional stories of people going into the afterworld and returning to give details of the afterworld were popular in the ancient world, and the characters were regularly named. So thus it was here. (However, it should be recognised that Jesus actually makes clear here that returning from the afterlife is something that is not allowed to happen).

Furthermore we must recognise that most of the details in the story must be metaphorical whether it is a parable or not. They cannot be taken as a genuinely physical description of what lies beyond the grave if for no other reason than that this is before the resurrection so that those in question have no bodies. The vivid detail is in order to convey ideas, not in order to give us the geography of the afterworld, and of the state of those who had passed on, except in the most general terms.

Analysis.

- There was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day (19a).
- b And a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores (20-21).
- c And it came about that the beggar died, and that he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom, and the rich man also died, and was buried, and in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom (22-23).
- d And he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame" (24).
- e But Abraham said, "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in the same way evil things, but now here he is comforted, and you are in anguish, and besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us" (25-26).
- d And he said, "I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment" (27-28).
- c But Abraham says, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them" (29).
- b And he said, "No, father Abraham, but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent" (30).
- a And he said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be

persuaded, if one rise from the dead” (31).

Note that in ‘a’ there is a rich man with great wealth (who manifestly does not hear God’s Law through Moses), and in the parallel if his brothers who are also rich do not hear Moses then no other method will be sufficient to move them. In ‘b’ there is a certain Lazarus living in misery, and in the parallel the rich man desires that this Lazarus whom he had left to live in misery go to his wealthy brothers to warn them of the danger that they are in. In ‘c’ Abraham comes on the scene in the afterlife, and in the parallel it is Abraham who points to Moses and the prophets and gives the important message of the story. In ‘d’ the rich man pleads for help for himself, and in the parallel he pleads for help for his brothers. And centrally in ‘e’ is the fact that no message can go to those who are in Hades awaiting final judgment, for none can go there to take it.

16.19 ‘Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day,’

The story opens with the picture of a man who according to Pharisaic teaching was a man blessed by God. He was wealthy, he dressed in the most sumptuous of clothing, he ate at a well-filled table. He saw himself as ‘almost royalty’. He would have been admired and respected, and have been seen as a good example by all, for nothing bad was known about him. And all thought how fortunate he was. He was shielded from the problems of life that faced most people, a picture of total (but selfish and self-satisfied) contentment. His clothing, if not his life, was modelled on the woman in Proverbs 31.22. But whereas for her it was a sign of her industry, for him it was a sign of his total self-sufficiency and selfishness.

16.20-21 ‘And a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores.’

There was also a beggar. He was probably a semi-invalid for he was ‘laid’ (the root of the verb means ‘thrown’) at the gate of the rich man, with the hope that some pity might be shown to him. He was full of sores (and therefore ritually ‘unclean’), but the only ones who had any association with him were the dogs who licked his sores, and this only aggravated his sores. His misery was thus added to by the fact that scavenging dogs snuffled around him, and he could do nothing about it. No one else wanted even to touch him. But there is one other difference. He has a name, in Hebrew ‘Eleazar’ (Eliezer), ‘he whom God had helped’. It tells us that although no one else was willing to touch him, God was willing to do so. The world saw a man to be pitied, a man who had nothing. But he had all the riches in the world, because he had God. And his name is mentioned because it was written in Heaven (10.20), and would be used when he went there. It may well be that in choosing the name Jesus remembered Abraham’s faithful servant (Genesis 15.2). Here was one who was faithful to Abraham’s memory.

The story has in mind that in general it is the ‘poor’ who tend to seek God, and the rich who keep Him at a distance (see 6.20-26, and compare the use of ‘poor’ in the Psalms e.g. 40.18; 72.2-4).

‘Gate.’ A large oriental gate leading into a city or a mansion (Matthew 26.71; Acts 10.17; 12.13; 14.13).

‘Desiring to be fed.’ All he wanted was a few crumbs, and he did not even get that. It is a picture of total lack of concern and utter callousness. (We can almost hear the rich man saying, “Don’t give him anything. It will only encourage him”).

‘The crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table.’ All he wanted was what was thrown away. But they were not for him for he could not get near the table. Such ‘crumbs’ were regularly eaten by dogs (Mark 7.28). So the only taste of the crumbs he got was from the misery of the

dogs licking his sores! (Compare here the vivid description in Judges 1.7. Even those poor souls were better off than he was).

Some have said that the rich man was condemned for being rich. But that is not strictly true. Abraham had been rich too. The stress is rather on the fact that he had the opportunity to show kindness and compassion on his doorstep and did nothing. He was totally callous. His sin was that he did nothing when much needed to be done. It was that that revealed the true state of his heart.

16.22a ‘And it came about that the beggar died, and that he was carried away by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.’

And one day the beggar died, the end that awaits us all, including the rich man. And from that moment on there was a great change, for Lazarus was now no longer the poor destitute at the gate, he was at the heavenly feast reclining next to Abraham. He was shown to be a true son of Abraham. The Jews thought of the heavenly hope as ‘Abraham’s bosom’ for this reason. It housed the seed of Abraham. Compare 13.28-29.

‘He was carried away by the angels.’ This was not an idea which occurs in Jewish literature until after the time of Jesus. In Jesus’ eyes this was Lazarus’ funeral procession. Those who tossed him into his pauper’s grave did not realise that they were actually placing him in the arms of angels ready for his procession into the presence of God. Man might not have been watching over him, but God was.

16.22b-23 ‘And the rich man also died, and was buried, and in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.’

The rich man also died, and was buried. What a splendid funeral he had. People probably talked about it for months afterwards. A sumptuous feast, a large funeral procession and a beautiful tomb. And he was respectfully and reverently placed in his tomb. What more could a man ask for in death? But there were no angels waiting for him there. He had no watching angel (Matthew 18.10; Hebrews 1.14). As far as Heaven was concerned he was anonymous. He had no name. That was the difference. Lazarus may not have been ‘buried’. He had been tossed into a beggar’s grave. But his name was known in Heaven.

But unknown to the world which had said its ‘goodbyes’ the rich man was in Hades in anguish. Hades was the Greek translation for the Hebrew Sheol, the world of the grave, the world of emptiness and of virtual nothingness (see Ezekiel 32.18-32; Isaiah 14.15-20), the outer darkness (Matthew 8.12; 22.13; 25.30), the other world apart from God. And as far as he was conscious he was in anguish. All was emptiness, all was darkness, all was distress, it was God forsaken.

It must be remembered that this was the intermediate state before the resurrection. Nor should we read from it too much of the details. They are there, not to tell us what the after world is like, but in order to get over the important point that follows.

‘Sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.’ This is a description provided for the purpose of getting over the points in the parable. It is not to be taken literally. We have no reason to think of those cast into the grave world as conscious of what is happening outside that world, nor that they can see what is outside it. Nor are we really to see that Lazarus was reclining next to Abraham. But, even if not literal, it is a true description of Lazarus’ joyous situation. The thought is rather that Abraham and Lazarus and all the multitude of the redeemed enjoyed wondrous and joyous fellowship in the presence of God.

We may note here that Abraham was an example of a rich man who was in Paradise, for he had recognised that his riches came from God (Genesis 14.23) and had used them accordingly.

16.24 ‘And he cried and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.” ’

This anonymous rich man who had needed nothing on earth, now cried out because he had nothing, and was in a state of torment.

‘Father Abraham.’ Like the Pharisees he claimed kinship with Abraham. But it had done him no good. Consequences in the afterlife are not the result of who we are, they result from what we have become.

Notice how the tables have turned. The rich man has become the beggar. He has nothing. He had never thought in terms of storing up treasure in Heaven, or of making friends in eternal dwellings. That had been for fools. But now he, who had never given even a cup of water to a beggar, was, as a beggar, calling on Lazarus for just a spot of water on his tongue. Lazarus in his earthly misery had once depended on him for crumbs, and he had let him down badly. Now he saw in Lazarus his only hope of even a little alleviation from his misery by means of a drop of water (a liquid ‘crumb’). Again we must not take this literally. He had no tongue, there was no flame, he was rather a disembodied spirit in anguish. The point is in the contrast.

Note the assumption that where Lazarus is there will be plenty of water. To a Jew living in Palestine a Paradise without water was inconceivable (see Revelation 22.1-5). Water was the essence of life. All knew of the burning heat of the desert and how it could leave a man parched and desperate and on the point of death. And of the joy of coming across an oasis or a spring which could finally relieve the desperate need. But in the world of the grave where men are apart from God, in contrast with those who go to be with God, there are no springs, not even spiritual ones.

16.25 ‘But Abraham said, “Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in the same way evil things, but now here he is comforted, and you are in anguish.” ’

‘Son.’ Abraham recognises his kinship. He is a son of Abraham, but it does him no good (compare 3.8). The Pharisees also laid great stress on being sons of Abraham (John 8.33, 39). The reply of Abraham to the rich man is the reply of Jesus to the taunts of the Pharisees (verse 14). If in your life time you receive good things, and do not use them to the glory of God, in the afterlife you will receive bad things. Riches are a heavy responsibility which few can bear and survive, for they corrupt the soul.

The reply is not saying that all who suffer in this life will have joy in the next life, and that all who have joy in this life will have sorrow in the next. That is to look at it superficially. The reply is particular to their situations. The one is the rich man who enjoyed his luxuries with thought or care for no one but his own family, who misused his riches and ignored God’s Instruction given in the Law of Moses. Who basically ignored God. He knew what the Instruction of God taught him, but the pleasure of sin and the delight in riches overrode it. His comforts anaesthetised him. He had thus rejected compassion and had chosen to enjoy ‘good things’. he had no doubt had compassion on those that he loved. But he had not looked outside his own circle. Thus the good things that he had enjoyed now witnessed against him, and cried out about his disobedience. The other is the man whose name was recorded in Heaven, who was the one whom God helped. In his life he had suffered lack, but because his heart was right towards God he had no lack in the next life. And the principle is that the joys or sorrows that they experienced in this life no longer matter, except to testify for or against what they were, for the next life sets all to rights for good or bad. (For was we discover at the end the condemnation of the rich man lay in the fact that he had ignored the Instruction of God).

16.26 “And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.”

The further point, vividly put, is that the moment that this life is over, destinies have been determined. There can be no changes beyond the grave. There is no intermingling of those

who enjoy eternal life with those who have gone to eternal death, nor can be. There is no Purgatory. What separates them is impenetrable.

‘A great gulf fixed.’ The idea is of people on both sides of an unbridgeable chasm. It is a vivid physical picture portraying a spiritual reality. There is no thought of a Purgatory. It is one place or the other with no way of moving in between.

16.27-28 ‘And he said, “I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” ’

Again this is not to be taken literally. Talking about the rich man as still having some good about him because he is concerned for others is irrelevant, for this is simply putting over in vivid picture form the fact that if men will not listen to the word of God, they will heed nothing. (In fact if we press the detail he still sees Lazarus as someone who is there in order to do as he is told and to see to his desires). This is accomplished by means of a fictional conversation between Abraham (whose voice crosses the great gulf!) and the rich man (whose voice, that of a disembodied spirit, does the same).

Putting it less picturesquely it is Jesus’ way of making clear what the responsibility is, of the rich man’s still living brothers, and of the Pharisees, and of all men. It is to recognise that they will get no voice from the dead beyond the grave (apart from the One Who will rise from the dead) and that they must therefore take heed to the voices put in this world by God.

‘Five brothers.’ The number ‘five’ is the number of covenant. (Compare the feeding of the five thousand). These five brothers represented Israel who always sought signs. But God will give them no further signs, for they have already received them in the Law of Moses. Why do they need signs when that book contains signs galore, and they ignore them? Why do they need to be told what to do, when God has already told them what to do and they disobey Him?

16.29 ‘But Abraham says, “They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” ’

Abraham points him, and all who hear, to Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. They are the means by which God speaks to the world. No reference is made to Jesus. The poignant emphasis is on the fact that the Pharisees, who claimed to honour Moses and the prophets, did not in fact even listen to them (see verses 15-16). They had actually shielded themselves from them by their tradition. For had they listened to their deeper voice they would have known the truth about riches. Even more so would they know about them if they heeded the approach of the Kingly Rule of God which has now come (verse 16).

For what the Law and the Prophets had to say consider the following, (Deuteronomy 15.1-3, 7-12; 22.1-2; 23.19; 24.7, 14-15, 19-21; 25.13-14; Isaiah 3.14-15; 5.7-8; 10.1-3; 32.6-7; 58.3, 6-7, 10; Jeremiah 5.26-28; 7.5-6; Ezekiel 18.12-18; 33.15; Amos 2.6-8; 5.11-12; 8.4-6; Micah 2.1-2; 3.1-3; 6.10-11; Zechariah 7.9-10; Malachi 3.5). Their message was clear enough.

16.30 ‘And he said, “No, father Abraham, but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent.” ’

The rich man was a typical Jew. He believed in being given wonderful signs. He was not alone. The Jews were always seeking signs. And the reason for this was because their past history had been full of signs that God was with them. They were like children wanting a repetition of the display. Yet the point is that if those signs from the past would not convince them, why should present signs? Interestingly enough God would shortly give the Jews the sign that they wanted in the raising of another Lazarus (God has a sense of what is apposite), and what did the Jews do? They planned to put him to death (John 12.10). Many people today are similar. They say that they would believe if only they saw signs. But Jesus is making clear that while that may be so, it would not be a belief worth having. Why, says the rich man, if one goes to them from the dead they will repent. No, says Jesus, not if they are the kind who do not listen

to the word of God.

16.31 'And he said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead." '

So Jesus tells him that if they will not listen to the word of God through Moses and the prophets, they will not listen even if one rises from the dead. This was prophetic concerning His own resurrection, but it also contained an eternal truth. It is that those persuaded by wonders and signs, will just as quickly forget them when time has eradicated the impact from their minds. Those only can be expected to persevere, who believe because of the word of God, and especially the word of God as given through Jesus.

The Teaching Of The Passage On The Afterlife.

We will pause in order to consider what lessons about the Afterlife we may be able to gather from this account as connected with other Scriptures, although too much dogmatism would be foolish. The first point is that in death those who are Christ's go to a different sphere than those who are not. Elsewhere we learn that they go to be 'with Christ, which is far better' than being on earth (Philippians 1.21). This must suggest consciousness and enjoyment. That ties in with here.

Unbelievers (revealed as such by their lives) go to a place of unpleasantness, of spiritual thirst and longing, of 'anguish'. They have no joy in Christ. They lack what God made us for. How much of the anguish is positive (this flame) and how much is due to what is lacked (thirst) it is impossible and unnecessary to say. But while it is doubtful if we should take the idea of fire literally (it is chosen because it causes thirst and is destructive) it is clear that it is a place best avoided. It is a place of 'outer darkness' (Matthew 8.12; 22.13; 25.30), away from the true Light.

Both await the day of Christ's appearing. At that stage the resurrection will take place. Then those who are truly His will rise in 'spiritual bodies' (1 Corinthians 15.44) and go into everlasting bliss into a new spiritual 'earth' (Isaiah 35.10; 2 Peter 1.11; Revelation 21.1-22.5), while those who are not His will be cast in their bodies into Gehenna (Isaiah 66.24; Mark 9.47-48; Revelation 20.15). This is the equivalent of the ancient rubbish dump outside Jerusalem and is described in those terms, except that its fires never go out and its maggots never cease consuming (Isaiah 66.24; Mark 9.48). But that it is largely spiritual comes out in that it is to receive the Devil and his angels (Matthew 25.41; Revelation 20.10). A literal burning furnace and literal fire would be of no use there. Many would argue further that nowhere is eternal consciousness suggested, except for the Devil, and that the impression given is otherwise. Consider for example the contrast in Revelation 19.20-21. The people themselves are cast in dead along with Death and Hades (20.12-15). It is the Devil and his minions who are cast in alive. But it is certainly something that no one would wish to experience, and the fact of punishment will be real and best avoided. It is deliberately revealed as horrific.

The Disciples' Responsibility Towards God's People And The Warning Not To Get Above Themselves Because Of What They Will Accomplish (17.1-10).

Some have spoken here of 'separate sayings' but there is no reason why this passage should not be seen as a unity. It is a string of connected sayings of a type regularly put together in Jewish teaching. It first warns against putting a cause for stumbling in front of the weak, which is fairly similar to the Old Testament warning against doing the same with the blind (Leviticus 19.14; Deuteronomy 27.18), and this is followed by the need to be ready to forgive weaker brothers and sisters, a failure in which might well cause a weaker person to stumble. This is then seen as making the Apostles aware that their own faith is weak, which results in a desire for increased faith. And it is at this point that they receive the assurance that their faith is large enough to accomplish what God wants to accomplish, because even faith the size of a mustard seed is sufficient for that.

Nevertheless their cry for increased faith is a welcome sign of growing humility. But Jesus is well aware that what they are to accomplish in the future, the planting of the Kingly Rule of God among the nations, might give the Apostles a sense of superiority, so He follows all that he has said with a warning not to get above themselves because they are able to do these things. They are not to see it as making them super-saints. They must keep in mind that they will only be doing what it is their duty to do, and that therefore all the glory must go to God. Having learned the secret of overcoming riches in the previous chapter, they are now to learn the secret of overcoming pride in their accomplishments.

Causing Stumblingblocks For Children (17.1-2).

The first warning is against putting causes for stumbling in people's way, especially in the way of weak disciples and believing children.

Analysis.

- a And he said to his disciples, "It is impossible but that occasions of stumbling should come (1a).
- b But woe to him, through whom they come! (1b).
- b It were well for him if a millstone was hung about his neck and he were thrown into the sea (2a).
- a Rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble (2b).

Note how in 'a' occasions of stumbling will come, and in the parallel they should beware of making little ones stumble. In 'b' there is a woe on those who do cause others to stumble, and in the parallel it is declared that it would be better to drown themselves quickly rather than do so.

17.1-2 'And he said to his disciples,

It is impossible but that occasions of stumbling should come,
But woe to him, through whom they come!

It were well for him if a millstone was hung about his neck and he were thrown into the sea,
Rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.'

It is first stated that life and a sinful world is such that it is impossible to avoid occasions of stumbling. They must necessarily come because of what people are. But the point here is to warn against being the cause of such stumbling. The word used here is skandala which indicates the stick which causes a bait trap to function. It is a warning against 'entrapping' people, in this case disciples, into temptation and wrongdoing, by false teaching and bad example.

One example of such a stumblingblock is found in chapter 16. The Pharisees might scoff at Jesus' views about wealth, but wealth was unquestionably a stumblingblock to many (Ezekiel 7.19). It certainly was to the rich man in the preceding story (16.119-31). It will be to the rich young ruler (18.18-26). It takes a special kind of person to be both wealthy and truly spiritual, which is why Jesus spoke so forcefully concerning it. Thus the Pharisees caused others to stumble by their attitude to wealth, even when they did not stumble themselves. Let the disciples beware that they do not do the same.

Another stumblingblock can arise from the example we set to others. Paul warned against allowing what we eat or drink to become a stumblingblock to others (Romans 14.21). We may know that food offered to idols is nothing, and we may be able to control how much we drink, but the more we are used in Christian service the more our example is watched and copied, and the more we therefore have to think about how our actions might affect others. We will not be comfortable in that Day if an alcoholic declares that it was our example that started him on his way to ruin. To the non-believer it sounds incredible that we should think like this, for to them their right to do what they like is all, but the Christian thinks differently, for he

has to give account to his Master.

A third way of causing people to stumble would be by false teaching. They must ensure that they are not being led astray like the Pharisees were seen to be in 16.14-18, and as a result of it leading astray those who looked to them for guidance. They must beware of the hypocritical ways (leaven) of the Pharisees (12.1).

Jesus treated the matter of causing others to stumble so seriously that He declared a 'woe' on a person who did it. Indeed He says that it would be better for that person to be instantly drowned than for them to cause a weaker person to stumble. Being a Christian teacher and guide is no light matter. We must study to show ourselves approved to God, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The millstone was the top stone used for grinding in the mill. It would have a hole in it and could thus be tied around the neck. If it were a large stone, as it would regularly be, the person would sink instantly. The emphasis is on a swift drowning (it was a severe warning, not actually intended to be carried into effect). See for a slightly different example Jeremiah 51.63. Being cast into the sea is an indication of judgment, compare Matthew 21.21; Mark 11.23.

It should, however, be noted that if such rough treatment is preferable to the alternative, then the alternative must be pretty gruesome. We should not treat lightly the idea of God's punishments. On the other hand the severity of the punishment must be seen in the light of the fact that to the repentant forgiveness is available.

'Rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.' Clearly anything is seen as better than causing the weak to stumble, either by what we say or what we do. 'Little ones' or 'lesser ones' (mikron) might indicate children, or weak disciples, or the poor. 'These' suggests that they were present and could be indicated. But there could well have been children who were with their parents among the disciples, whom He uses as an object lesson. But all classes of 'weak ones' are in the end to be included. For the strong must have a regard for the weak (Romans 15.1). For although Jesus valued children, He also valued the weak (compare Isaiah 42.3). The parallel in the section chiasmus favours the idea that it is little ones who are mainly in mind, for in the chiasmus it parallels the bringing of children to Jesus (18.15-17). Compare also Matthew 18.5 where it is clearly indicated that the millstone treatment is recommended for those who cause child believers to go astray.

The Need To Forgive Readily (17.3-4).

Jesus also stresses the need to forgive readily those who recognise their faults. Being unwilling readily to forgive could easily result in causing the weak who have sinned, and sense that they are unforgiven, to stumble and fall away. Such people often need to be made to feel welcome so as to help them to get over their weakness. In such cases being unforgiving can only cause hurt and resentment, and be a stumblingblock to the person who senses that he is not forgiven. And yet it is not always easy to forgive. That is why in the Lord's prayer we are reminded that we should forgive, because we have been forgiven. This is a reminder that we too are weak. And if we consider how much has been forgiven to us, we will find forgiving far less difficult.

Analysis.

- Take heed to yourselves (3a).
- b If your brother sin, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him (3b).
- b And if he sin against you seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to you, saying, I repent (4a).
- a You shall forgive him (4b).

In 'a' they are told to take heed to themselves, and in the parallel they are to forgive. In 'b'

they are to rebuke a sin in a brother and if he repents to forgive him, and in the parallel the same is to be true if he sin seven times in a day.

17.3-4

Take heed to yourselves,
If your brother sin, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him.
And if he sin against you seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to you, saying, I
repent,
You shall forgive him.

‘Take heed to yourselves’ connects these verses directly to the idea in verses 1-2. There is no more important attitude towards young believers than to be able to forgive them. That does not, however, mean dealing lightly with sin. If a brother or sister sins then their sin must be drawn to their attention, not in a hypercritical or censorious way, but gently and lovingly in the same way as we would want them to do it to us. Nevertheless they must be shown that it is wrong. Sin must not be condoned. The verb used can mean ‘To speak seriously about, or to warn in order to prevent an action, or in order to bring one to an end’. But then if they acknowledge their sin and change their heart and mind about it they are to be forgiven. Back biting or the nursing of grudges is thus forbidden. In Matthew Jesus amplifies the idea to include seeking the help of others where the person fails to repent (Matthew 18.15-17).

And the same applies if they sin seven times in the day. This is not a number to be counted so that once we reach seven we can stop, it is really saying, ‘as often as it happens’. The point is that continual forgiveness must be available, just as we need continual forgiveness from God. Thereby they will be strengthened and raised to continue to go forward (instead of stumbling even more) and we will be blessed and forgiven for our own sins.

But to put others before ourselves by avoiding being a stumblingblock, and to forgive others continually for what they do against us, are not easy things to do. They require faith in the One Who holds all things in His hands. That is certainly how the Apostles saw it, for they then turned to Jesus and asked Him in the light of all this to increase their faith. Note the change from ‘disciples’ to ‘Apostles’. There were many disciples, only twelve Apostles. The Apostles rightly saw that they had a special responsibility for all the disciples who followed Jesus.

The Power of Little Faith Combined With A Great God Which Will Plant the Kingly Rule of God, And The Need For Humility In The Service Of One Who Gives Such Power (17.5-10).

What Jesus has just required of His disciples in verses 1-4 has made the Apostles appreciate that spiritually they are lacking. So with absolute confidence in their Master they ask Him to give them increased faith. He had previously given them faith to preach, heal and cast out evil spirits. Now they are asking for more faith so as to enable them to walk without causing others to stumble, and so as to enable them to continually forgive, to say nothing of the other attributes that they are going to need. They want to be men of such faith that they do not fail God.

Jesus therefore points out that what they need is not a greater faith, but faith in a greater God. If their recognition of the greatness of God is sufficient they will be able to do remarkable things, for they have been chosen for that very purpose.

But while guiding them in this Jesus recognises the dangers for them in what He now says of overweening pride, and thus seeks to bring home to them the need to recognise that they will only have the power that He is describing because they are doing what they are commanded to do, and that they do it as servants and not as masters.

Analysis.

- a The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith” (5).
- b And the Lord said, “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would say to this

- sycamine (mulberry) tree, ‘Be you rooted up, and be you planted in the sea, and it would obey you’ (6).
- c “But who is there of you, having a servant ploughing or keeping sheep, who will say to him, when he is come in from the field, ‘Come straightway and sit down to meat’,” (7).
 - d “And will not rather say to him, ‘Make ready that on which I may sup, and gird yourself, and serve me, until I have eaten and drunk, and afterwards you will eat and drink?’” (8).
 - c “Does he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded?” (9).
 - b “Even so you also, when you shall have done all the things that are commanded you” (10a).
 - a “Say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which it was our duty to do.’” (10b).

The request for increased faith, if answered, may well open the gate to false pride. Thus in guiding them in the way of faith Jesus carefully reminds them that they are servants who are merely doing their duty. What they will be able to achieve they will be able to achieve because of that fact. They will therefore have nothing to boast about in it.

Note in ‘a’ that they request a greater gift of faith, and in the parallel they are to acknowledge that they are thereby only servants doing their duty. In ‘b’ they are promised that their faith will such that they will be able to command the sycamine tree to replant itself in the sea, and in the parallel He reminds them that they will only be able to do so because they themselves are under command. In ‘c’ he questions whether a servant expects his master to serve him, and in the parallel he questions whether a servant expects to be thanked. Central to all in ‘d’ is his responsibility to serve his master.

17.5-6

‘And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

And the Lord said, “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed,”

You would say to this sycamine (mulberry) tree, ‘Be you rooted up, and be you planted in the sea,’

And it would obey you.”

The plea for increased faith is by ‘the Apostles’ in contrast with ‘the disciples’ in verse 1. The Apostles are growing in their awareness of the importance of their position, and of their own weakness for the task. They feel therefore that they need their faith to be made stronger. But Jesus, who sees much further ahead, wishes to bring home to them that it is not the strength of their faith that matters. What matters is the One in Whom they have faith. If their faith is in the right Person, and they see Him for what He is and recognise their own position within His purposes, then even the tiniest faith will accomplish mighty things. But in order for this to be so they must be people of a forgiving spirit. We should note in this regard that in the passage in Mark which deals with a similar subject exercising faith and forgiveness are closely connected (Mark 11.23-25).

Their appeal for increased faith arouses in Jesus a desire to prepare them for the future that lies ahead. For He knows that they will not always just be ministering among a small group of spiritual ‘babes in Jesus’ in Palestine who need to be tended, and guided over obstacles (verses 1-2), and forgiven when they fail (verses 3-4). They will shortly be facing the greater task of going out to the world with the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God.

This sudden introduction of words which transcend their context has been noted earlier, compare 10.17-22; 12.49-53. We have another example here.

So now is the time for them to stop looking at their own faith and to recognise that they serve the One Who can do great things, and because He has chosen them, will do even greater

things through them. For as they serve God in obedience to His commands even the tiniest of faith will accomplish the impossible. If they have faith as small as a mustard seed they will be able to command a 'sycamine tree' to be rooted up and replant itself (phuteuo) in the sea.

At a minimum this is telling the Apostles that in the future they are going to do wonderful things. There would be no point in it otherwise. And aware of this he is concerned that they do not as a result become proud and arrogant. That is why He follows up this statement with a parable on humbleness of service. But there is probably more to it than that as we now see.

For in the Old Testament the replanting of a tree is regularly symbolic of the establishment of a nation (see Psalm 80.8 (kataphuteuo); 80.15 (phuteuo); Isaiah 5.2 (phuteuo); Jeremiah 2.21 (phuteuo); Ezekiel 17.3-15 (phutos), 22-24 (kataphuteuo); 19.10-14 (phuteuo)).

The sycamine, probably the black mulberry tree, was a large tree, common in the Shephelah, with very strong and enduring roots, and that had a very long life. It was the equivalent in Palestine to the cedar in Lebanon, and the oak in Bashan. It was seen as immovable and almost indestructible. Moreover the coming Kingly Rule of God has been likened to a similar mighty tree in Ezekiel 17.22-24 (in that case a cedar). Furthermore the Kingly Rule of God has already been likened in Luke to a mustard tree which grew large from a mustard seed (13.19), while Israel is likened elsewhere to the vine, the olive tree and the fig tree when fruitfulness is in mind. So a mulberry tree (sycamine) would be a suitable picture of the strong, expanding and firmly rooted Kingly Rule of God, for it was a common tree in Palestine and often spoken of alongside the olive and the vine, and seen as the recognised Palestinian equivalent of the cedar, even if a little inferior to it (1 Kings 10.27; 1 Chronicles 27.28; 2 Chronicles 1.15; 9.27; Psalm 78.47; Isaiah 9.10 in LXX). Being 'planted in the sea' could represent being established among the tumult of the nations. For the sea is regularly seen as representing the nations. See Psalm 65.7; Isaiah 17.12-13; Daniel 7.2-3; Revelation 13.1; compare Isaiah 57.20. Thus the thought here may be either of transplanting the new Israel and setting it among the nations, or of transplanting the Kingly Rule of God from its beginnings in Palestine and setting it among the nations. In the context of 'faith like a grain of mustard seed', which has previously been linked with the growth of a tree representing the Kingly Rule of God (13.19), the thought of the transplanting of a strong and powerful and enduring tree may well be an expansion on that idea.

Here then the mulberry tree may be seen as representing the Kingly Rule of God, as the vine and the fig tree can also do (John 15.1-6), the mulberry tree being cited here because of its being a symbol of strength and permanence (when the vine and fig tree are called on it is to illustrate fruitbearing, not permanence). The idea is thus that just as they are to nurture the infant new Israel by preventing stumblingblocks (verses 1-2) and by a constantly forgiving relationship towards those who are genuine believers and repent of sin daily (verses 3-4), so they will also establish the mulberry tree of the Kingly Rule of God among the tumult of the nations. And He wants them to know that they do not require increased faith for this purpose, just confidence in a mighty God. Compare here Acts 4.24-30. It is a declaration that the faith that they already have is sufficient for the task in hand.

This rooting up and replanting of the Kingly Rule of God is clearly depicted in Acts where Jerusalem is finally rejected and replaced as the source of the proclamation of the Kingly Rule of God by Syrian Antioch (Acts 12-13; 21 - see our commentary on Acts).

Note On How This Contrasts With Mark 11.20-25.

In Mark 11.20-25 we have a passage with a similar emphasis on what a little faith can do, but there the picture is of the 'casting' of a mountain into the sea, rather than that of 'replanting' a tree there. In the context of the cursing of the fig tree, which represents God's curse on Jerusalem for rejecting the Kingly Rule of God, the disciples are told there that by their faith they will be able to cast a mountain into the sea. In context the mountain is the Temple mount.

The casting of it into the sea thus refers to its being subjected to the tumult of the nations as a result of its resistance to the establishment of the Kingly Rule of God as revealed in its behaviour towards Jesus and its persecution of His followers. We can compare here what He would say shortly concerning the destruction of Jerusalem (Mark 13; Luke 21.20-24). It is the negative side of what in this statement in Luke is the positive side.

End of note.

17.7 “But who is there of you, having a servant ploughing or keeping sheep, who will say to him, when he is come in from the field, ‘Come straightway and sit down to meat’,”

Jesus is well aware, however, that power as well as wealth can corrupt people and prevent them from keeping their minds on things above, and He therefore introduces a parabolic saying in order to counteract this, a saying which reminds them that what they will accomplish will be accomplished because they are men under orders, they are servants who are only doing their duty. What will be accomplished will all be of God.

Note the contrast between the servant here and the ones in 12.37. There the master will serve them, but here the servant is kept firmly in his place. They teach two different lessons. What master, asks Jesus, who has a servant who is ploughing or keeping sheep (both of which have been said to be occupations of those who are establishing the Kingly Rule of God - 9.62; 15.3) will invite his servant on returning to the house to immediately sit down and eat with him? They must therefore beware of putting themselves on a par with God and with Jesus.

This was another danger of Pharisaic teaching, for they often gave the impression that they considered that they had put God under an obligation (modern Christians can do the same). Thus their own teachers had to warn them, ‘do not be like slaves who minister to the master for the sake of receiving a bounty’, and ‘if you have wrought much in the Law do not claim merit for yourself, for this is the end to which you were created’.

17.8 “And will not rather say to him, ‘Make ready that on which I may sup, and gird yourself, and serve me, until I have eaten and drunk, and afterwards you will eat and drink?’ ”

Will the master not rather tell the servant to get the meal ready, and serve it up to the master and his family, until they are satisfied, and only then be able to eat and drink? The servant will be made to acknowledge that he is a servant. He is not invited to the formal meal. This austerity of grace (he is still fed) is so unlike much of what is said elsewhere about God’s bounty (12.37; 22.29-30), that it demands a special context like it has here.

However, overall this is one of Jesus’ constant stresses, that just as He has come as the Servant of the Lord, so must they recognise that they too are servants, and that the highest honour is found in serving (22.25-27). It is in direct contrast with man’s view that he indicates his superiority by being served.

17.9 “Does he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded?”

Indeed this is so much so that the servant will not even expect to be thanked. He will recognise his place. He is merely doing what as a servant is his duty. It was a generally held view that servants must be kept in their place. But while we should certainly thank those who serve us in any way, it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that we do not deserve God’s thanks. For He is our Creator and Redeemer, and all the gratitude is due from our side. The wonder is that He uses our frail services in the accomplishment of His mighty purposes. After all He could just as well achieve them without us. So we not only do no more than it is our duty to do, but our success is also wholly due to His gracious working.

17.10a “Even so you also, when you shall have done all the things that are commanded you,”

In the same way when the Apostles are carrying out all the commands given to them, they are to be the same.

17.10b “Say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which it was our duty to do.’”

They are to say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which it was our duty to do.’ Thereby they will be saved from the dangers of pride and arrogance (1 Timothy 3.16; 1 John 2.16), and of thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think (Romans 12.3). By ‘unprofitable’ is meant that they render a full service in accordance with their contract but do nothing above that which gives their master more than his due and thus merits extra reward.

Note how in the section chiasmus (above) this is paralleled with the story of the Pharisee who does think that he does his duty and is very proud of the fact, in contrast with the one who comes humbly seeking mercy, and is thereby justified (18.9-14).

One Grateful Ex-Leper and Nine Less Grateful Ones (17.11-19).

This story follows aptly after the previous one, for there the transplanting of the Kingly Rule of God among the nations was in mind, and here we have a multiplying of what occurred in the incident in 5.12-15, the cleansing of skin-diseased persons who symbolise Israel in its sin, expanded by the inclusion of a Samaritan, ‘this stranger’, to include the wider world. Already non-Jews are coming back to God and entering under the Kingly Rule of God! The transplantation of the Sycamine tree has begun.

Skin disease was held in horror by all, and skin diseased men and women were seen as to be avoided. In both Jewish and Samaritan Law they were expected to avoid human company, except for their own kind, and to call ‘unclean, unclean’ so as to warn people to keep away from them (Leviticus 13.43-46). For in both Jewish and Samaritan Law skin disease rendered them permanently ritually unclean. They could neither live among men nor approach the Dwellingplace of God. And any who came in contact with them became ‘unclean’ and unable to enter the Temple until they again became clean.

There are a number of indications in the Old Testament that Israel were seen as the equivalent of skin diseased persons. Isaiah could cry out, ‘We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags’ (Isaiah 64.6), a typical picture of a skin diseased person (even though uncleanness through menstruation was primarily in mind there), and some have seen in the Servant of Isaiah 52.14; 53.3-4 the picture of a skin diseased person as He bore the sin of others. Moreover the picture in Isaiah 1.5-6 of Israel as covered with festering sores could well have been that of a skin diseased person. And it was recognised that the worst fate that could befall a man who usurped the privileges of God’s sanctuary was to be stricken with skin disease (2 Chronicles 16.16-21). Never again could he enter the Temple of the Lord. So like the skin diseased man, Israel were unclean before God (Haggai 2.14) (It is true that in Haggai it is by contact with death. But being permanently skin diseased was seen as a living death, so the thoughts are parallel). This was no doubt why Jesus saw such healings of skin diseased people as evidence of the presence of the Messiah (7.22). Thus a skin diseased man was a fit depiction of Israel’s need and the world’s need.

So when ten skin diseased men approach Jesus for healing, including one stranger, we may well see behind it the intention of depicting not only Israel, but the world in its need, a need which can only be healed by the Messiah (compare 7.22). There may also be intended a reminder of the fact that a greater than Elisha was here. Elisha had enabled the healing of a skin diseased man (2 Kings 5), and he also a ‘stranger’, although he had not done it by his word. Rather he had sent him to wash seven times in the Jordan. He had put him firmly in the hands of God, and God had healed him. And he, like the Samaritan here, had returned to give thanks. But here Jesus takes the healing on Himself. It is He Who heals them at a distance by His thought. The implication of this could be drawn by the reader.

We have become so used to healing miracles that probably not one reader stops in wonder at what happened here. Ten men whose lives were devastated by skin disease receive their lives

back again, and all at a word from Jesus. His signs and wonders continue. And yet unquestionably in this section they are only mentioned because they have another lesson to teach. Here it is the widening of the success of the Kingly Rule of God, the importance of gratitude, and the centrality of faith.

Analysis.

- a As they were on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing along the borders of Samaria and Galilee and as He entered into a certain village, there met him ten men who were skin diseased, who stood afar off (11-12).
- b They lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (13).
- c When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And thus it happened that, as they went, they were cleansed (14).
- d And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, with a loud voice glorifying God, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks, and he was a Samaritan (15-16).
- c And Jesus answering said, “Were not the ten cleansed? but where are the nine?” (17).
- b “Were there none found who returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?” (18).
- And He said to him, “Arise, and go your way. Your faith has made you whole” (19).

Note that in ‘a’ the men stood afar off and in the parallel the Samaritan is made whole by faith. In ‘b’ all call for mercy, while in the parallel only one returns to give glory to God. In ‘c’ all are cleansed, and in the parallel only one of those cleansed returns to give glory to God. And centrally in ‘d’ we have the stranger who returns to give glory to God and offering his thanks to Jesus.

17.11 ‘And it came about that, as they were on the way to Jerusalem, he was passing along the borders of Samaria and Galilee.’

When Luke gives a detailed introduction he regularly has a purpose in it. Thus the mention of being on the way to Jerusalem brings the shadow of His death over the narrative. It is as the One Who is going to bear the sins of many, and to bear our sicknesses and diseases, that He can heal these men.

As we have observed earlier Jesus making of His way to Jerusalem to die is not just a straightforward journey. Having been in the environs of Jerusalem twice He is now going along the border between Galilee and Samaria. This explains the presence of a Samaritan among the skin diseased men who are the subject of the passage. But Luke probably intends also by his presence to imply that the journey to Jerusalem will have effects that will go beyond Judaism. It is because He is on His way to die in Jerusalem that His journey takes Him to a position where He is midway between Samaria and Galilee, for that death will break the barriers between them.

‘On the way to Jerusalem’ has a sombre note to it. It is all part of His set purpose and expectancy to die in Jerusalem. This is indeed why He can offer cleansing.

17.12 ‘And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men who were skin diseased, who stood afar off,’

Approaching a certain village (Luke’s source may not have known its name) Jesus came across ten men who ‘stood afar off’. They were skin diseased and therefore unclean and were thus forbidden to join themselves with crowds. They were outcasts from Israel, ever on the periphery of things. They did not have the forthrightness of the skin diseased man in 5.12-15 who actually approached Jesus. On the other hand they were in fact were being more obedient to the Law. The men would, however, want to maintain their proximity to villages in order to receive alms from them. They had no other honest means of survival.

But Luke may well have intended a hint here that God’s mercy was available to those who are

'afar off' (compare Ephesians 2.13).

17.13 'And they lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." '

These men pleaded in loud voices for Jesus to show His compassion to them, acknowledging Him as 'Master' (Epistata - the One who stands over). This title is usually only used by Luke as spoken by disciples of Jesus, and the idea may be in order to demonstrate their interest in His message. It is one of the words Luke uses instead of Rabbi because of his Gentile readers.

Men crying to Jesus for mercy is a theme of the Gospels, for He is the compassionate and the merciful. Compare 16.24; 18.38-39; Matthew 9.27; 15.22; Mark 10.47-48.

17.14 'And when he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And thus it happened that, as they went, they were cleansed.'

When Jesus became aware of them (an eyewitness touch) He commanded them to go to the priests to be examined, as though they were those who had been cured of their skin disease. We are reminded here of how Elisha commanded Naaman to go away and do something, rather than healing him on the spot. That too indicated a cleansing to come. It was calling on them for an act of faith. They still had their skin disease. But such was their faith that they went. And as they went they were healed. They were 'made clean'. They thus no doubt then proceeded to go to the priests to obtain their certificate of cleansing, as Jesus had told them to do.

17.15-16 'And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, with a loud voice glorifying God, and he fell on his face at his feet, giving him thanks, and he was a Samaritan.'

But one of the men had not gone with the others. He was a Samaritan and would seek out his own priests. But as soon as he became aware that healing had taken place and that his skin disease had gone, he was so grateful that he forgot about seeking out the priest. And immediately turning back, and glorifying God with a loud voice, he came to Jesus, and falling on his face before Him, he gave Him thanks. Now that he was healed all he could think of was to express his gratitude to the Master. And he was a Samaritan.

17.17-18 'And Jesus answering said, "Were not the ten cleansed? but where are the nine? Were there none found who returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?"

Jesus was impressed by his attitude of thanksgiving and faith. When He asks His question about the nine He is not suggesting that they have done anything wrong. They are in fact only doing what He had told them. What He is doing is bringing out the great contrast between them and this man. They are being genuinely obedient. But what a difference there was with this man. To him thanking Jesus had been more important than obtaining a certificate of cleansing as soon as possible. (And only someone who has been ostracised for years can understand how important that was). All he wanted to do was glorify God and express his gratitude to the Master, and he could not wait to do it. He did it immediately.

And Jesus was especially impressed by the fact that the one who wanted to glorify God and give Him thanks in this way was 'a stranger', that is, not of the Jewish religion. He was one of those excluded from the inner courts of the Temple by the notice that forbade access to 'strangers'. And yet he had been the first to come to the inner courts of God. This is the second non-Jew of whom Luke has stressed Jesus' great admiration for his attitude (compare 7.9). No doubt Luke wanted his Gentile readers to appreciate the fact.

"Were not the ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" Perhaps Luke wants us to remember the woman with her ten coins, of which one was lost. Here is the one coming back to the Saviour. And the nine? They typify those who being already 'found' do not experience quite the same joy and gratitude as the one who realises just how great his debt is. Of course they were grateful, Jesus had had compassion on them. But their gratitude has become more formal. No wonder they caused less joy in Heaven.

17.19 ‘And he said to him, “Arise, and go your way. Your faith has made you whole.” ’

Then He turned to the man and declared that his faith had ‘saved him’, had made him whole. Thus it is made clear that non-Jews also could find salvation through faith in Jesus. The idea is not that the other nine were not saved. It is in order to stress that this ‘stranger’ was saved.

The Future Glorious Appearing of The Son of Man (17.20-25).

The Pharisees are aware of Jesus’ continual teaching concerning the coming of the Kingly Rule of God and approach Him to ask Him when it is coming. But their problem is that they are looking for the wrong thing. It is their view that the Messiah, once he has come, will in some way overturn the Romans, and will then establish Israel as a free, independent nation whose influence will reach out to the world, with them in overall authority. Thus they are looking for the establishment of a physical kingdom on earth of a type like other kingdoms (the kingdom of Herod, the kingdom of Philip, and so on). They have failed to recognise that much of what the prophets had promised could not in fact be fulfilled in a physical kingdom, and that Jesus had come bringing something better, the everlasting Kingdom promised by the prophets.

In His reply Jesus will bring out firstly that the Kingly Rule of God is already here and is being entered by those who believe in Him and follow Him, and secondly that the finalisation of that Kingly Rule will take place when He comes in glory. Thus they can be sure that any Messiah who comes in any other way is false. Such a one will not be the Son of Man as revealed in Daniel 7.13-14.

The passage can be analysed as follows:

- **a Being asked by the Pharisees, when the Kingly Rule of God is coming, He answered them and said, “The Kingly Rule of God is not coming with observation, nor will they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the Kingly Rule of God is within (or ‘among’) you” (20-21).**
- **b He said to the disciples, “The days will come, when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it” (22).**
- **c “They will say to you, ‘Lo, there!’ ‘Lo, here!’ Go not away, nor follow after them” (23).**
- **b “For as the lightning, when it lightens out of the one part under the heaven, shines to the other part under heaven, so shall the Son of man be in His day” (17.24).**
- **a “But first must He suffer many things and be rejected of this generation” (25).**

Note that in ‘a’ the earthly aspect of the Kingly Rule of God is stressed, and in the parallel it is dependent on the earthly suffering and rejection of the Son of Man. In ‘b’ there will be days when men desire to see the day of the Son of Man and will not see it, and in the parallel when His Day comes it will be in splendour as bright as lightning. And centrally in ‘c’, once He has suffered, men are not to go looking for Him here on earth, (because when He does come it will be in glory that is revealed to the whole world). The centrality of this emphasises its importance. The purpose of this passage is finally in order to warn His disciples that in the coming days after He is gone they are not to be so overburdened with their task that they welcome some pseudo-Messiah.

But within it also we have a summary of Jesus’ teaching concerning the present Kingly Rule of God and the glorious appearing of Himself as the Son of Man, which can only take place after He has suffered. It is in the light of this that all His previous teaching must be seen.

17.20-21 ‘And being asked by the Pharisees, when the Kingly Rule of God is coming, he answered them and said, “The Kingly Rule of God is not coming with observation, nor will they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the Kingly Rule of God is within (or ‘among’) you.” ’

The Pharisees pressed Him as to when the Kingly Rule of God over the world was coming,

and Jesus declares that it is already there among them. He wants them to recognise that it is not something that will be established in outward form, with a king, and courtiers, and an army, and a judicial authority. No one will be able to point and say, 'look here it is' or 'there it is'. For it is not visible in that way. Rather it is being built up as the hearts of men are being changed. Those who are looking to the King and are already submitting to the Kingly Rule of God as introduced by Him, have already entered under that Kingly Rule. Those who turn from Him and reject His message and do not submit to His authority remain outside the Kingly Rule of God. So the Kingly Rule of God is now within the community of Israel, invisibly but effectively. But not all Israel is a part of it.

Yet there is a sense in which it is visible. Jesus could say to His disciples, 'Heal the sick and say that the Kingly Rule of God is come near to you' (10.9). It had come near in their being there preaching in the cities, and in their manifesting divine power there (10.11; compare 7.22-23). But it would not be with an outwardly constituted authority. It would be apparent to all who recognised that God was at work among them through the power of Jesus. This is the same emphasis as is given in Acts (see Acts 2.22, 36; 4.10-12, 29-30; 8.12-13)

Indeed its presence had just been revealed in the healing of the ten skin-diseased men. For here among them they had seen a whole and complete group of men who represented the condition of the world in its need, and they had been wholly restored. How could the Pharisees then ask for the Kingly Rule of God to be revealed? Why it had just been revealed in the best way possible! And Jesus' presence and the continual manifestations of power through Himself and His disciples continually revealed it (11.20). And its power and influence would now spread throughout the world (9.5-15; 12.49; 13.18-21; 14.23-24; 16.16; 17.6).

Note on 'the Kingly Rule of God Is Within (Among) You.'

- 1). This could mean that it is active within individuals, and that that is where the Kingly Rule of God is to be found. Each man, as it were, is to be aware of the Kingly Rule of God within him. Now of course it is unquestionable that there is truth in this. It was the word acting within men that brought them into the Kingly Rule of God. But nowhere else is the Kingly Rule of God so described. It is always spoken of as something much larger which has to be entered. So while undoubtedly capturing individual hearts is a part of it, the concept of the Kingly Rule of God was vaster far than could be restricted to the individual heart. It is a combination of all those captured hearts under God.
- 2). This could mean 'is within you'. In this case 'you' would represent Israel. It is here within Israel. This was certainly true. It was like a nut within the shell, the leaven within the dough. This would therefore include 1). above, with the seed growing in many hearts, and yet also take into account the wideness of the concept as willing to take in the whole of Israel if they would respond. The Kingly Rule indicated the totality of those in whose hearts the seed had produced its fruit.
- 3). It could be translated 'the Kingly Rule of God is among you'. This is a perfectly feasible translation, and can be seen as very much like 2). except possibly without the same emphasis on the internal working. The idea is then that 'the Kingly Rule of God is being built up among you', of which you need to be aware.
- 4). It can be taken as signifying that the Kingly Rule of God is among them in the presence of Jesus the King. There is no doubt that the presence of Jesus did indicate the presence of the King, and therefore of the Kingly Rule, but Jesus is probably seeking to convey more than that. He wanted them also to recognise that along with Him were others who had come under the Kingly Rule of God.

It would appear probable that 2). is what Jesus has in mind, thus incorporating both 1) and 3) and illustrating the parables of the seeds and the leaven, while we may see 1) and 3) as giving the necessary differentiations for the full understanding of 2). This does not exclude 4). Indeed

it was the presence of the King that made possible the whole. So in the end all aspects are required for the total picture.

End of note.

17.22 'And he said to the disciples, "The days will come, when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it." '

Then Jesus turned and spoke to His disciples. He did not want them to think that it was all quite as simple as that. While the Kingly Rule of God was here among them as He had just declared, it did not mean that the King would continue to be permanently among them as He now was. It did not mean that success was just around the corner, and that the going would be smooth (like it on the whole appeared to be at the moment) and that the whole world would respond. These were exciting days, 'the days of the Son of Man' on earth, but He was not now introducing 'the days of the Son of Man' on a continuing basis. There was to be a break in 'the days of the Son of Man'. The Son of Man (note here the clear association of the Son of Man (verse 22) with the Kingly Rule of God (verses 20-21) for it is the Son of Man Who receives the Kingly Rule of God - Daniel 7.13-14) was to be taken from among them, for His days among them would cease. Soon they would look around and would not see Him. 'His days' among them will then no longer be enjoyed. Normality will have been disrupted. And thus in the future there were to be many days when they would long to see Him, and He would not be there. They would even begin to doubt whether He really was ruling, and even possibly be in danger of following impostors because they so yearned for His presence.

This warning was necessary. The disciples were already building up the picture in their own mind of His soon coming triumph. They probably believed that by means of His extraordinary powers, of which they had only had a glimpse, He would shortly act in order to establish His Kingly Rule, after which they would then take up their places under His Kingly Rule, seated at His side and sharing His authority (Mark 10.35-41). But if they thought like that their confidence would soon be shattered. For it would not happen. So He wanted them to recognise that those ideas were not based on a sound foundation. Rather they must realise that days of uncertainly lay ahead, days of trial, days when they will find things difficult to understand, days when the Son of Man has been taken from among them (verse 25) and they will long for the days when He had been among them. They would long for the outward manifestation of His Rule by His presence among them and would not see it. They were not to look for a snug establishment of His Kingly Rule.

'The days will come --.' Compare Isaiah 39.6 where it refers to uncertain future times some time in the distance.

'The days of the Son of Man.' These will shortly be compared with 'the days of Noah' and 'the days of Lot' (verses 26-27). In both the latter cases everyday affairs like eating and drinking were carrying on, and then suddenly all came to a climactic end. And 'the days' took place before the climactic end. It will be like this with the days of the Son of Man. Here He was eating and drinking with them, but the days will end equally climactically, first in His suffering (verse 25) and then in His glorious appearing (verse 24). And in between those two events would be days when they looked back wistfully and longed for the days of the Son of Man that they had enjoyed, and they would look forward to the day of the Son of Man that was coming. And hopefully it would spur them on. But those days could never be retraced.

For what they will miss is Him. They would never forget the days that they had spent with Him, and their hearts would delight in that day when once more they would see Him face to face, but meanwhile they would have to go on. And the grave danger was that in their desire to have Him again they might fall prey to a false Messiah. So let them remember His words now, that no Messiah who appears on earth can be the true Messiah, for when He does return it will be unmistakable. It will not be as a Messiah on earth. It will be like the transfiguration

a hundred times over.

By this Jesus is preparing them for the hardness of the future. It needed to be made clear to them that in future they must not look for normal days or days of straightforward living like those enjoyed by the majority of men, nor even like those who enjoyed such lives in the days of Noah and the days of Lot. And sometimes in the hardness of the future they will look back and long for one of 'the days of the Son of Man', one of these days when He walked with them on earth and they enjoyed His fellowship and love, days that they will remember so vividly, days when all seemed to be going forward so smoothly, but they must recognise that they will not again see such days, for He is not coming back in that way. Rather they must look on ahead and recognise that their lives in the future are to be anything but smooth and normal, awaiting His coming in glory. They must thus serve on against all odds until suddenly and climactically the Son of Man will come. The road ahead is going to be tough.

Had we not had the comparison with the days of Noah and the days of Lot, which are vividly described in their normality (verses 26-27), we might have seen 'the days of the Son of Man' as referring either to the judgment on Jerusalem (see verse 31) or to the period after His coming in glory. But the comparison with the days of Noah and Lot makes clear that that cannot be so. It must thus refer to the present days in which He is among them, the days in which they have settled into a period of contentment with things as they are. These are 'the days of the Son of Man', the days of His powerful and successful ministry on earth, when He forgives sins (5.24), lives among them eating and drinking (7.34), establishes the new Laws of His Kingly Rule and declares the principles of the Sabbath (6.5), and has nowhere to lay His head (9.58). Days that they share with Him. And when inevitably in days to come they look back on these days in their worst moments, and say, 'If only we could get back to things as they were then', they must remember His words now.

Note on The Days of the Son of Man.

If we are to take Luke seriously this phrase must be interpreted in its context, and not just as suits our theories. Let us consider what we know about them.

- The first thing we know about them is that they will not go on permanently, for the disciples will one day long to see one and will not see it. Thus there will be a period in the disciples' lives which will not be the days of the Son of Man. They will be either looking back to them, or looking forward to them. The 'days of the Son of Man' are thus not just all the days leading up to His second coming.
- We know also that He has revealed to them that He will be away from them and will return at His second coming as the Son of Man (12.35-48).
- We know from the comparison with the days of Noah and the days of Lot that the days of the Son of Man will be before the final climactic event (verses 26-29).
- The climactic events connected with the days of the Son of Man are His coming suffering (verse 25) and His coming in glory (verse 24).

The only days which fit in with all these facts are His days with them on earth. In the excitement of second coming teaching the days of Jesus' life on earth can seem almost secondary, but of course they were not. They were huge. They were in a sense the most primary days of all. For it was during those days that He fulfilled the Father's will to the uttermost (Hebrews 10.5-10) and accomplished the redemption of mankind and gave His life a ransom for many (Mark 10.45). These were the days of the Son of Man supreme as He forgave sins, re-evaluated and expanded on the Laws of Moses, and went on to offer Himself, as the Son of Man, as a ransom for many (Mark 10.45). They were also the days in which He 'ate and drank' among us as the Son of Man (7.34), ideas connected with both 'the days of Noah' and 'the days of Lot'. They were the days of endurance which the son of man in Daniel 7 had to undergo prior to His approach to the throne of God.

But why then does He speak of them in the future tense in verse 26? The answer is that He does not. It is the climax of those days that He speaks of in the future tense, a climax that has not yet come. The climax of His days of suffering which will be the foundation of all the rest.

Other suggestions for the meaning of the term are:

- **That they signify the same thing as ‘the days of the Messiah’ signifying the period after His return. But there is a great deal of difference between what the Scriptures say about the days of the Son of Man and the days of the Messiah. For in Daniel 7 the days of the son of man are days of suffering, when with His people He suffers under the hand of the beasts, days which then lead up to His approaching the throne of God and receiving His Kingly Rule. Furthermore such an interpretation would not meet the criteria mentioned above, and thus can only be held if the phrase is taken totally out of its context and we assume that Luke was simply throwing phrases together without thinking about them.**

Some would support this position by translating ‘the first of the days when the Son of Man is revealed’, which is undoubtedly a possible translation, but that ignores the clear parallel in verse 26. It also raises the question, 1) why in that case Luke does not use the singular, and 2) as to why they will not see it, for surely the point of verse 24 is that they will see it.

- **Some see it as indicating the days immediately preceding His return ‘in which the signs of His imminence are made clear’. These would fit all the criteria but there is no obvious reason why these should be specifically called ‘the days of the Son of Man’ in contrast with any other days prior to His coming, for He was present with them as the Son of Man in His days on earth as He makes very clear, and He would promise that He would continue with them to the end, ‘lo, I am with you always’ (Matthew 28.20). Nor is it clear what kind of signs would indicate His imminence. There has been so much tribulation in the world that it is difficult to see what kind could indicate the time of the end.**

Some see ‘the days of the Son of Man’ as indicating His special days of Messianic revelation such as the transfiguration, the resurrection, the ascension, the appearances to Stephen and Paul, etc. but that is surely being too technical.

End of note.

17.23 “And they will say to you, ‘Lo, there!’ ‘Lo, here!’ Go not away, nor follow after them,”

Nor are they to be deceived by any who claim to be reintroducing those days and claiming that they are again setting up ‘the days of the Messiah’ in this physical world. For when He does return it will not be ‘here’ or ‘there’. Thus such people must not be heeded. Compare the similar phraseology in 21.8, ‘Take heed that you are not led astray, for many will come in My Name saying, ‘I am the one’, and ‘the time is at hand’. Do not go after them.’ So any earthly claimants to Messiahship are to be rejected out of hand, for the final conclusion to the days of the Son of Man will not be introduced in that way. It will not be something earthly. In the chiasmus this warning is the central point. Central to all, He is saying that He is warning them not to be taken in by false claimants to Messiahship, and that it is a warning that must be heeded. They must recognise that what is now in mind in the future is not some small earthly series of events, but God’s mighty working from Heaven. The future Kingly Rule of God is to be heavenly not earthly.

17.24 “For as the lightning, when it lightens out of the one part under the heaven, shines to the other part under heaven, so shall the Son of man be in his day.”

For when He comes He will be revealed in splendour and glory (compare 8.29) in the same way as the lightning lights up the whole heavens. There will be no mistaking it. Every eye will

see Him, and those also who pierced Him (Revelation 1.7). The splendour and glory of His appearing will be manifested to all (9.26; 21.27).

Thus any future activity of the Son of Man once He has been taken out of the world by suffering, will be cosmic. He will rise as the Lord of glory, He will be in Heaven as the Lord of glory, and He will return as the Lord of glory. By this He is building on all the claims that He has made up to this point and adding to them. He is revealing His unique God-likeness.

17.25 “But first must he suffer many things and be rejected of this generation.”

But He must first suffer on earth. That He is unquestionably speaking of Himself now comes out (although those who had heard His inner words to the disciples earlier could hardly have doubted it). For He now declares that before that glorious appearing must come the times of suffering. For He Himself (the Son of Man - verse 24; compare 9.22) must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. First He must be manifested in suffering and then He will be manifested in glory. So this is the way in which the days of the Son of Man must end, in the Day of suffering that will culminate in the Day of glory. And for the disciples, in between the suffering and the glory, will be the days of longing for the days of the Son of Man, both past and future.

The Crucifixion and Coming of The Son Of Man In Glory Will Issue In The Final Judgment and The Final Consummation (17.26-37)

In the Section chiasmus this parallels verses 20-21. It expands on the idea of the Kingly Rule of God being among them by pointing out that one day will come the great day of separation between those in the Kingly Rule of God and those who are not. In that day those in the Kingly Rule of God will be taken out from among those who are not, and then those who are left will be judged.

Analysis.

- a As it happened in the days of Noah, even so will it be also in the days of the Son of man” (26).
- b “They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all” (27).
- c “In the same way even as it occurred in the days of Lot. They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built, but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (28-29).
- d “In the same way will it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he that will be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away, and let him that is in the field similarly not return back” (30-31).
- e “Remember Lot’s wife” (32).
- d “Whoever will seek to gain his life will lose it, but whoever will lose his life will preserve it” (33).
- c “I say to you, In that night there will be two men on one bed, the one will be taken, and the other will be left” (34).
- b “There will be two women grinding together, the one will be taken, and the other will be left” (35).
- a “And they answering say to him, “Where, Lord?” And he said to them, “Where the carcass is, there will the vultures also be gathered together” (36-37).

Note that in ‘a’ the scene is set and in the parallel we are given the end solution. In ‘b’ some were saved and some were destroyed, and in the parallel the same applies. In ‘c’ we have the same situation connected with Lot and the same parallel. In ‘d’ men must do the opposite of normal and in the parallel the same applies. In ‘e’ central to all is the injunction to ‘Remember Lot’s wife’ who preferred the worldly city of Sodom to security with God and perished. The previous passage had centred on ‘remember that there will be false messiahs’.

Here the warning goes even deeper, 'remember Lot's wife'.

17.26 "And as it happened in the days of Noah, even so will it be also in the days of the Son of man."

Here the 'days of Noah' undoubtedly refer to the days prior to the day that Noah left the world and entered the Ark as the next verse makes clear. We would therefore expect the parallel phrase 'the days of the Son of Man' to signify the days prior to the climactic events that happened to Him, the days that led up to Him too leaving the world. The future tense in the latter case need indicate no more than that the days of the Son of Man are not yet complete, and the climax is yet to come. It is especially that climax that is in the future.

17.27 "They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all."

And what happened in 'the days of Noah?' They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage. In other words life seemed to be going on as normal. They continued blissfully unaware of Noah's activities in their midst. They ignored both his building of the Ark which condemned the world (Hebrews 11.7) and the proclamation of his word among them (2 Peter 2.5). They were complacent in their sin. And then Noah entered into the Ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.

'They married, they were given in marriage.' This may especially have in mind Genesis 6.1-4, in which case it means that they not only ate and drank, but also that they engaged in the deepest sin. On the other hand the comparison with Lot might suggest that it is simply referring to the everyday things of life.

If we compare this with what has previously been said in verses 22-25 what does it tell us? What we have described here is a period during 'the days of Noah' when the majority were living in blissful unawareness, even while the presence of Noah preaching among them was ignored. They simply continued in sin, eating and drinking. And then came the climax. The one who had been among them went into the Ark, and the final result was that Judgment came on them. This suggests that we must see the comparative 'days of the Son of Man' as representing a similar period of unawareness while Jesus was preaching among men, followed by His being taken away, in His case by suffering, death and resurrection (verse 25), resulting finally in His coming in final Judgment (verse 24), this last following a period during which His own have bewailed His absence (verse 22).

If we add to this that the Son of man was accused of eating and drinking among men (7.34) along with public servants and sinners, the parallel is even clearer. This means then that the event which follows 'the days of the Son of Man' is the crucifixion, resurrection, enthronement and coming again, all seen as one activity, which is how God saw them. By this He 'entered the Ark' and made possible salvation for all those who would follow Him. It was for all those who would follow Him without looking back (verse 31 compare 9.57-62), and for all those who would 'enter the ark' with Him by taking up the cross and following Him (verse 33 with 9.23-24).

17.28-29 "In the same way even as it occurred in the days of Lot. They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built, but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."

A second example is now given, the days of Lot, which is 'in the same way', thus again being compared with the days of the Son of man. They ate and they drank, they participated in all the activities which made up their lives firmly establishing themselves in the world, but when Lot was taken out of Sodom (because his heart was grieved at their utterly sinful behaviour - 2 Peter 2.7-8) fire and brimstone came down from heaven and destroyed them all. Once again we have the eating and drinking, which parallel the life of the Son of Man and those in the

world in His day, and the taking out which parallels His crucifixion when He too was taken out of the world. From that moment on the final judgment on the world was determined. We can compare here ‘the days drew near for Him to be received up’ (9.51) which also includes more than just the crucifixion.

17.30 “In the same way will it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed.”

But here in the second example there is possibly a greater emphasis on the final Judgment depending on how we read the ‘day that the Son of Man is revealed’. This may be in contrast with ‘the days of the Son of Man’, with more emphasis thus being placed on the final judgment

17.31 “In that day, he that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away, and let him that is in the field similarly not return back.”

The first illustration of the urgency of these days is to picture it in terms of escaping from catastrophe without looking back. Then there will be no time in which to go down and pack, or remove furniture (a common picture of escaping refugees), there will be no time to return to the city from the countryside. All will happen immediately. The point is not the giving of advice on what to do, but in order to indicate the speed at which all will happen. There will simply not be time for anything. And there is also the suggestion that they were not to have their hearts set on earthly things to which their thoughts would instinctively turn when they recognised that the end of all things had come (as Lot’s wife did with Sodom). It is not a question of logical thinking, it is a question of what will spring into their minds at such a catastrophic moment.

Interestingly a similar picture is drawn of those who would be faced with the catastrophe which would face Jerusalem in 70 AD (Mark 12.14-18), a precursor of the final Judgment, words which Luke deliberately omits, possibly to avoid confusion.

17.32 “Remember Lot’s wife.”

The second illustration is Lot’s wife.’ She did look back. Unlike Lot, her heart was in Sodom and not with God. She was reluctant to leave. And she became an example of all who are judged. Thus those who would be ready for that day must ensure that their hearts are not like hers. There must be no reluctance to leave, and that will only be so if all their hearts are set on Him.

17.33 “Whoever will seek to gain his life will lose it, but whoever will lose his life shall preserve it.”

The third illustration is between those who cling to their lives of sin, like Lot’s wife, and thus perish, and those whose hearts, like that of Lot, are on the righteousness of God (2 Peter 2.7-8), in New Testament terms those who take up their cross and follow Christ (9.24 with 23).

So two examples of those whose eyes are to be fixed on God in verse 31 are followed by the example of the one whose eyes were fixed on sin in verse 32, and in this verse the two are contrasted. Furthermore these examples, which are very much in terms already applied to the disciples, emphasise the continuity between the disciples and those who will be alive in the ultimate day of Christ’s return. For between the Day of suffering and the Day of glory such tests may come again and again. In these three warnings we can see His instructions, not only for the time of the end, but also as those which are to be followed throughout the whole preceding period as they make themselves ready for that Day.

17.34 “I say to you, In that night there will be two men on one bed, the one will be taken, and the other will be left.”

We now have a final statement of the climactic events which will take place, and typically of Luke, one refers to men and one to women. They equally participate in both blessing and

judgment.

The first example is of two men, probably father and son, or two brothers, sharing a mattress, which was a common feature of those days when shared warmth could be important and space was lacking. They would, however, each be covered by their own cloaks. On that night one would be taken and the other left. Here we have a vivid example of what is described in 1 Thessalonians 4.16-17 and of the division in families described in 13.52-53. The Lord has come for His own.

17.35 “There will be two women grinding together, the one will be taken, and the other will be left.”

The same picture is now applied to women grinding in the mill together, the one turning the stone, the other pouring in the grain. Very often this would be mother and daughter, or two sisters. But the one will be taken and the other left. No more vivid picture could be given of the ‘invisibility’ of the Kingly Rule of God, for no one, apart from the individuals, and they might be wrong, could be sure who was under the Kingly Rule of God and who was not (compare verse 21).

17.36-37 “And they answering say to him, “Where, Lord?” And he said to them, “Where the carcass (body) is, there will the vultures also be gathered together.”

This then raised the obvious question among His listeners. Where then would they be taken? The reply is a vivid one. The vultures gather to their food supply, and in the same way the people of God will be gathered to the One on Whom they feed, the One Who gave His body that they might become one with Him and live by their partaking of Him as the bread of life (22.19; John 6.35; 1 Corinthians 10.16-17; 12.12-27). This is a picture of those who have ‘come’ and ‘believed’ (John 6.35). We might not have used this picture of Jesus, but He clearly had no problem with it. (Like many of Jesus’ parables it could give an immediate meaning, with a deeper meaning in it once more was known).

Others would, however, soften the interpretation, taking the question as meaning, where will this take place? They therefore take it to mean ‘at the place of carnage’, or that ‘where the conditions are fulfilled, there the revelation of the Son of Man will take place’, or that ‘like vultures they would go to their natural gathering place’, or that ‘where the dead body of human nature is, there the judgments of God will come’, or that ‘doom will fall inevitably on those who are left’. Some point out that the picture is similar to that in Revelation 19.17-18, while others would see ‘the eagles’ as referring to Roman eagles. But the verse does seem to suggest that the picture points to those who will be taken, and that the question is asking where they would be taken.